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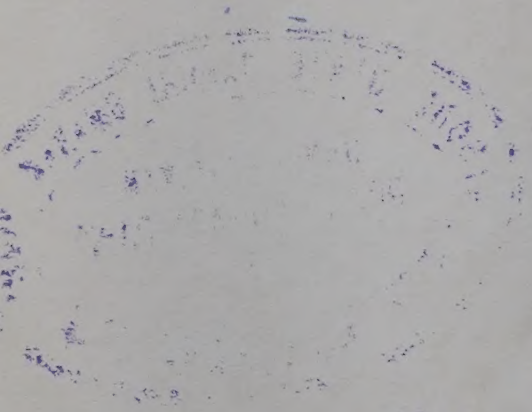

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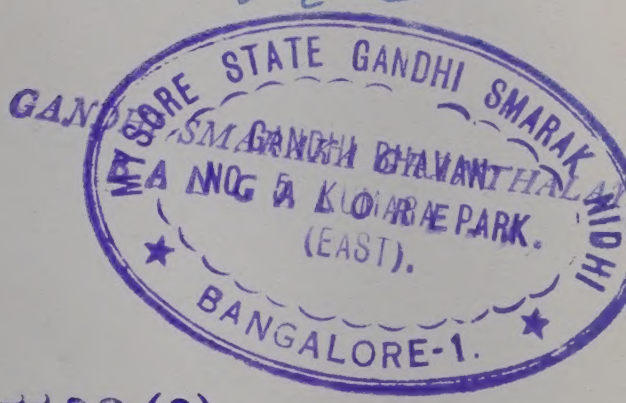

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SANKARADEVA

DR. MAHESWAR NEOG
Jawaharlal Nehru Professor
Gauhati University

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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA
NEW DELHI

December 1967 (Agrahayana 1889)

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Rs. 2.00

PRINTED IN INDIA
PUBLISHED BY THE SECRETARY, NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA,
NEW DELHI-13 AND PRINTED AT THE CRESCENT PRINTING WORKS
NEW DELHI-1

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FOREWORD

THIS COUNTRY has produced remarkable personalities in every walk of life since the earliest times. Our history is crowded with names of outstanding persons who have made notable contributions whether in art, literature, politics, science or other fields. Some are household words. There are many whose names are familiar but about whose life and work little is known to the public. There are others about whom people know little but who have made remarkable achievements.

The history of a country is, to a great extent, the history of its great men and women. They have moulded it and built it up. It is essential for the ordinary citizen to know something about these personalities in order to understand how our country has evolved.

The life of Shri Sankaradeva, the great Vaishnav Saint of Assam, is one of the most extra-ordinary and romantic stories in our history. He was a saint, a missionary of Vaishnavism and harbinger of a new culture in Assam. In fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that he is the maker of modern Assam, as we know it. Professor Maheswar Neog has written an interesting book giving his life and work for the ordinary reader who is not aware of the great work that Sankaradeva has done for that part of India.

We are grateful to Prof. K. Swaminathan and Shri Mahendra V. Desai for accepting the Editorship of this Series.

NEW DELHI
December 5, 1967

B. V. KESKAR

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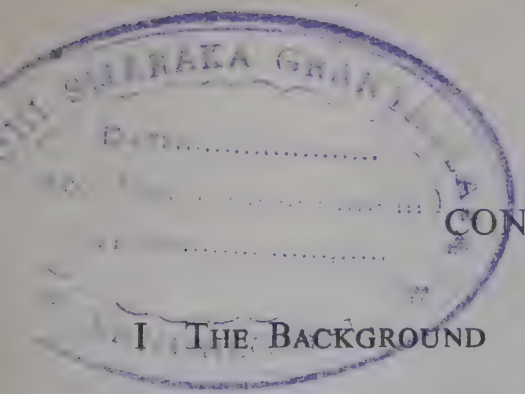

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THE RENDERINGS of the song, 'Rest, my mind, rest on the feet of Rāma', and of the verse, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, IV. 39.24, are incorporated in the text here (pp. 10 and 15) from Professor Banikanta Kakati's *Sankara Deva* (Madras, 1921) as also are the translation put in the Anthology of the poems, 'pāwe pari hari karuho kātari', 'anya devī deva nakaribā seva', and 'yāra yena mati kare vedaka vyākhyāna'. The author is also indebted to Shri Hiren Dutta and Dr. P. C. Kataki of Gauhati University for their help and suggestions.

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I

THE BACKGROUND

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of credulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."—Charles Dickens was not going here to describe the advent of Sankaradeva ; but he might have.

When Sankaradeva, the poet-artist and mystic, was born in the middle of the fifteenth century of the Christian era, Assam or Kāmarupa or by whatever name this north-eastern part of India was known then was politically and socially in the melting-pot. The old Kāmarupa extended from the Lohit division of the North-Eastern Frontier Agency on the east to the river Karatoyā which now cuts across Northern Bengal and East Pakistan, on the west. The valley of the strong-currented Brahmaputra, forming a sort of central corridor, and the different hills forming side rooms to which one could enter from that corridor, constituted the old kingdom in some stages of its history. That is at least indicated as the spiritual domain of the tantric goddess, Kāmākhyā, in the *Kālikā-purāna*, written in the 11th or 12th century

A.D. Of the three Hindu families of kings beginning with Pushyavarmā, Sālastambha and Dharmapāla the last comes down in point of time to the 12th century. After that the dark ; and we have to depend sometimes on very scrappy, and sometimes on not-very-dependable, sources for the political history of Kāmarupa, meaning the western part of the country. In the eastern, however, some equilibrium was gathering with the emergence of Āhom power, which first established itself in Assam in 1228 A.D. and was slowly expanding towards the west by subjugating different Tibeto-Burman tribes and fighting back the chief amongst them, the Kachāris, who slowly retreated towards the southern part of modern Assam. There were a number of petty chiefs, known as Bhuyāns, who held their principalities of varying sizes in different parts of the country. They lacked cohesion among themselves and submitted to, whenever they found themselves confronted by, some formidable power. Many of them raised their heads against the growing Āhom supremacy but were put down one by one. In the middle and concluding parts of the 15th century they were still found in large number outside the Āhom kingdom. In the beginning of the 16th century a Koch chief, Visvasimha, rose steadily into power when he had to bring under subjugation a number of these Bhuyāns and other petty rulers of the land till he made his capital at Kamatānagar, fourteen miles to the west of the present-day town of Cooch Behar.

If the political scene of Kāmarupa was full of turmoil, the social conditions were far worse. The country was disunited through various jarring religious sects, heterogenous faiths and practices. The land had from the

earliest times been the home of various Tibeto-Burman tribes, who had their own religious beliefs and rites, which came slowly to be influenced by different forms of Hindu religion and also in their turn influenced them. In the Sākta work, *Yogini-tantra*, the admission is frankly made that in the domain of Kāmākhyā religion was of Kirāta birth. The earliest Hindu faith to have had a place in Assam was Saivism, which when later heavily encroached upon by Saktism went underground and found a fertilising soil among the Kachāris, who called Lord Siva by a new name, Bāthau. He is still worshipped among different tribes as Budhā, the old god, or Baliyā-bābā, the mad god.

Saktism or the worship of "a goddess of many names and forms, who is adored with sexual rites and the sacrifice of animals, or when the law permits, of men," became the biggest religion of Kāmarupa by the beginning of the second millenium of the Christian era. The Nīlāchala hill near Gauhati with the yoni-pitha of Kāmākhyā became the centre of this religion. Both the chief scriptures of Assam Saktism, the *Kālikāpurāna* and the *Yoginitantra*, belong to the left-hand or extremist school of Saktism, and enjoin blood-sacrifices, the offering of one's own flesh and blood 'nearest to the heart' to the deity, and various other esoteric rites. The ritual consisting of the partaking of the five elements, better known as pancha-makāra, forms a prominent feature. Another form of ritual was virgin-worship, in which a girl is considered as representing the Devi and the procreant principle of Life. Blood sacrifice was, and still is, a constant part of Sākta rituals ; and a great number of animals was daily and occasionally slaughtered

in propitiation of the goddess. The slaughter of men, perhaps in no way connected with what is known as head-hunting ritual of some of the Assam tribes, had got its canonical sanction in the *Kālikā-purāna*, and was occasionally performed particularly in the Bhairavi temple on the Nilāchala and the Tāmresvari temple near Sadiya, now in the Lohit District of the NEFA. Then again, there was the sabarotsava, the festival of the Sabaras (a tribe), the very description of which reeks of frank sensuality.

There were the many excesses of a very debased form of Buddhism known as Vajrayāna, "a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas." Kāmākhyā or Kāmarupa and Sirihatta of this region was of special significance to the Vajrayānists, who held pancha-makāra as indispensable to the votary and enjoined the enjoyment of Prajnāpāramitā or perfect truth residing in every woman. In the writings of the Vaishnavas there are references to the Vajrayānist religion as vāmānaya or pāshandanaya, left-hand or heterodox way, and to its adherents as Buddhist magicians, who exploited people with secret doctrines and the show of funny idols.

The followers of Nathism and worshippers of Dharma, the tortoise god, perhaps with some Austric origin, of Manasā, the serpent goddess, and of Sitalā or Āi, the small-pox goddess, and other minor deities were also many. Sanyasis or mendicants roamed about the towns and villages, and some of them were only cheats or robbers in the guise of the religious. Men were heathens, and worshipped clouds and rivers, barns or hay-lofts. Animistic beliefs and usages were rife not only among the

tribesmen but also among the uneducated general populace. Spells and incantations found a good market. An atmosphere of mystery shrouded the whole country inasmuch as Kāmarupa became known to the outside world as a land of black art and necromancy, by which one could take and give others any form one liked. Superstitions held the uncouth in very firm grip and made them easy victims of malicious gods and rapacious magic-men.

II

THE STORY OF THE SAINT'S LIFE

IN THE FAMILY of the Siromani or overlord of Bhuyān chiefs, who held their small principalities on both the banks of the Brahmaputra in the middle of the present-day state of Assam, was born a beautiful child in October 1449. The Siromani, Kusumavara Kāyastha Bhuyān, had been looking forward to this event with great eagerness, for although he had married quite a few years back, his wife, Satyasandhā, did not bring forth any child and the Bhuyān was so much despairing of it that he even married a second wife. It is said that he was offering worship to Lord Siva with a view to having the boon of a child from the easy-to-satisfy god. The child, therefore, came to be called Sankara or Sankaravara. It grew fast to be a lovely lad but lost both the parents very early and was left to the loving care of Kusumavara's mother, Khersuti.

We do not know if it can be generalised so widely as to say that the childhood of every future great man is boisterous. But Sankara did have wild and gay early years full of play and all boyish pranks. Children's games employed all his waking hours ; and he would very often go catching birds and deer in the forest and tortoises and porpoises in the water of the Brahmaputra, or swimming across that big river in its fulness and back. His main passion, however, was the keeping of cows and

roaming in the fields after them. In this way it was seen that he became twelve years of age.

One day when Sankara was sitting at his meal, Khersuti sat by his side and began a sort of harangue, telling the grandchild how scholarly and what able administrators his father, grandfather and other forefathers were, and how Sankara, but a frolicsome urchin at the age of twelve, was going to mar that glorious reputation of the Siromani family. This cut Sankara to the quick, and he was now in a mood for schooling. An auspicious Thursday of Bhādra was found by astronomical calculations to take the boy to a tol school kept by a well-known brāhman scholar named Mahendra Kandali. Having to desert an open-air life all on a sudden, Sankara could not turn his mind properly to books. He played the truant, and managed to earn a day's holiday by bribing the teacher with a little money and a piece of cloth. But he was otherwise a devoted scholar and gave his days and nights to the ancient folios. He even burnt the midnight oil, keeping two book-stands on either side of his bed and a sufficient amount of betel-nut preparations to chew. It is about this time that Sankara came to be called Sankara-deva at the instance of his guru; for, it is held, Mahendra Kandali one mid-day entered the school premises only to find Sankara sleeping there with a cobra raising its big hood to provide shade to the boy in the hot sun. The pandit saw, as it were, the very vision of the pupil's greatness and made the rule for all the pupils under him that the young Bhuyān should be addressed with a 'deva' and not simply as Sankara. We are not very sure about the course of studies which scholars in the tols in those days had to undergo and in what

duration. But it is pretty certain that in about six or seven years Sankaradeva came out a finished scholar in the usual Sanskrit lore, not excluding the Vedas and Upanishads, and including the two Indian Epics, the purānas, tantras, Kalāpa grammar, and literature (kāvya) in general. He could make fine poems now, and the easy narrative, *Harischandra-upākhyāna*, is ascribed by his biographers to his days at school. He seems to have acquired a good knowledge of Indian philosophy, and he practised yoga exercises from about this time, until he gave it up later after coming across the supreme message (tattva) of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*.

Paying the guru's fees sumptuously, Sankara returned home ready to begin life. Belonging to the family of overlords of Bhuyāns and having all the sound education, wisdom and youthful ability at his back, he might have organised them all, otherwise never a well-knit group, into a small federated state, able to hold its own against the Āhoms, rising into a stable power in the east since the second quarter of the 13th century, and the different tribal principalities like that of the Kachāri. His near and dear ones at least expected him to make a good ruler. But Sankara would like more to lead an intellectual life than worry over the hum-drum of office and other duties of a Siromani. His kith and kin, however, insisted on his marrying very early and taking to the task of administration. And it was this insistence that won the battle. Sankara assumed the duties of Bar-Bhuyān, and, still very young, came to be known as Dekā-giri, the Young Master. He married a beautiful Kāyastha girl, Suryāvati, who, however, died soon after giving birth to a girl child, Manu or Haripriyā. This

event, once again, brought him a sense of deeper detachment from worldly ways. He thought it best to go on pilgrimage to different holy places of India. All the same, he had to wait for a few years till he could marry the daughter off to a young Bhuyān, Hari.

Sankaradeva set out on his pilgrimage in 1481 when he was thirty-two years of age. He rendered his household responsibilities to the care of his son-in-law and the affairs of Bar-Bhuyāship to his uncles, Jayanta Dalapati and Mādhava Dalapati. Mahendra Kandali and Rāmarāma Vipra, son of the family priest and Sankaradeva's life-long friend and associate, were among the seventeen persons who accompanied him. This group of pious people wandered all over Northern India, seeing temples and tirthas particularly sacred to Vishnu. The pilgrims visited Puri and stayed there for a considerable time, perhaps several years. At this place in Orissa there was the concourse of pilgrims from all parts of India who carried with them various religious dogmas and many melodious lyrics. It was, again, in this holy place that the way of jnāna-bhakti, the religion of Love of the Supreme Being bringing in its train the Supreme Knowledge of the Real, came as a revelation to Sankaradeva, already a poet with a strong dislike for worldly life. It is said that he took Lord Jagannātha, enshrined in the bardeul at Puri, as his guru as well as his only worshipful, for like Kabir he did not have a human guru and was criticised on that account by his contemporaries. He carried home with him a deep impression of the nascent neo-Vaishnava movement and the sweet poetry that grew in its wake. He refers to this poetry in one of his songs: 'In Oresā, Vārānasi and other places the pious people

sing the numbers made by poets.' His own imagination took fire, taking him further and further away from mundane pleasures. It is at Badarikāshrama in the upper reaches of the Gangā that he composed one of his earliest bargita lyrics:

Rest my mind, rest on the feet of Rāma;
Seest thou not the great end approaching?
My mind, every moment life is shortening,
Just heed, any moment it might fleet off,
My mind, the serpent of time is swallowing
Knowest thou death is creeping on by inches.
My mind, surely this body would drop down,
So break through illusion and resort to Rāma.
Oh mind, thou art blind;
Thou seest this vanity of things,
Yet thou seest not.
Why art thou, O mind, slumbering at ease?
Awake and think of Govinda.
O mind, Sankara knows it and says,
Except through Rāma, there is no hope.

Not unacquainted earlier with that great work, *Bhāgavata-purāna*, he saw it now in a new light, the light that was bestowed on it by tne elegant interpretation of the Bhāgavata-bhāvārtha-dipikā commentary of Sridhara-swāmi, a Mahanta of the Govardhana math at Puri.

Wanderlust and a thirst for light, more light, carried the pilgrim through many places over twelve years. It is held by several biographers that in course of his wandering Sankaradeva received a few proselytes, one biographer counting Rupa and Sanātana Gosvāmis of Vrindāvana

among them. Although this appears to be somewhat a strange statement, it is curious to find at the end of the invocatory nāndi of Rupa Gosvāmi's drama, *Vidagdha-mādhava*, the words: "I have this day been commanded (to write the drama) in another dream by Lord Sri-Sankaradeva, the incarnation (of God) as a bhakta."

When Sankaradeva reached back home after his very long sojourn outside, his grandmother was still living. She insisted that he should marry a second time and settle as a good householder. The Bhuyāns on their part pressed on him the necessity of his taking up the administration once again. But Sankaradeva was charged within with the light of another kingdom, the Kingdom of God. He had seen how the whole of Northern India was pulsating with a new life, a life of liberalism evoked by the neo-Vaishnava movement. He had already decided on the mission of his life and was now very intent on efforts to fulfil it. He knew that administrative and household responsibilities would be a bar to those efforts. All the same, he could not avoid those responsibilities just because of his great affection for his kith and kin. He married Kālindi in 1497, and earlier resumed his duties as Siromani Bhuyān. But he could not take his mind away from the scriptures, and had a small temple built in a lonely place, where he could sit together with other people, discuss matters of sāstrās and hold prayers together. This became the embryo of a great institution called sattra in the style of vedic sacrificial sessions (*e.g.*, the five-night pancharātra sattra, mentioned in the *Satapatha-Brāhmana*) or intellectual intercourses of later times (*e.g.*, brahma-sattra, discussing the Ultimate Reality or Brahman. About this time there came from

Puri one Jagadisa Misra, a holy man hailing from Tirhut, carrying with him a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* furnished with the Bhāvārtha-dipikā commentary. The holy man, a sub-disciple of Vishnupuri Samnyāsi, the compiler of the *Bhāgavata-bhakti-ratnākara*, is said to have done this at the behest of Lord Jagannātha, which might simply mean that Sankara left with some one at Puri an instruction that the book should be sent to him when available. There were discourses on the purāna as interpreted by Sridhara for about a year when Jagadisa stayed with Sankaradeva at Bardowā. The saint was now very firmly convinced that the message of the purāna—the message of the ekaśarana cult of Vishnu-Krishna—was superb and supreme. He combined three elements to form the main tenets of his creed: satsanga (the association of the good, that is, bhaktas taken from the *Bhāgavata*, nāma (the chanting of the Lord) taken from the *Padma-purāna*, Uttara-khanda, and ekasarana (the undivided devotion to one and the same God) as enunciated by the *Bhagavad-gitā*. He took upon himself the task of propounding the doctrines of bhakti or the religion of Love in simple verses of various metres in the language of the people and of propagating them through congregations. He found that people were attracted almost readily towards this new creed, and he took to regular proselytizing.

About this time Sankaradeva is said to have written and made his first ever play, *Chihna-yātrā*, 'drama with paintings'. The paintings for the background were made by him on cotton-made paper and depicted the celestial abode of Vishnu, Vaikuntha. He rehearsed his kinsmen and followers in the music and dances required in the

drama and had new models of instruments made for him. He himself acted in the rôle of Sutradhāra (Manager-Director) and of Vishnu in certain parts of the play, which took altogether seven days to complete. The attraction of this pageant drew many a one to be Sankara's disciple. He became a preacher, free and frank, beginning his charity at home and initiating his own people to the new-found faith.

As I have said elsewhere, 'Sankaradeva's Vaishnava movement and renaissance in the cultural sphere, which accompanied it, thus had their inception while he was still in his native place at Bardowā, and the Bāra-Bhuyān chiefs held their small principalities round about the place. Sankara had fixed here the principal tenets of his faith and the method and technique of its propagation through literature and music, he had composed short bargita lyrics, the longer kirtana lyrics and other types of poetry. But the religious and cultural restoration was yet to gather its full momentum.'

In the meantime there developed a period of unrest. The Bāra-Bhuyāns' territories bordered on those held by the Tibeto-Burman tribe, the Kachāri. There were constant skirmishes between these two small powers over grazing and farming land with interludes of friendship and amity. The friction was acute when Sankaradeva first took over the duties of Siromani Bhuyān, and managed to tackle the relations with a great amount of tact and accommodation. Now that he was almost relinquishing these duties and was concentrating more and more on matters spiritual, his kinsmen, who were looking after the management of the estates, bungled, and friction with the Kachāri and the consequent lack of

peace became inevitable. Without Sankaradeva having to look into the matter, the Bhuyāns caused heavy casualities on the other side. Finding regrettably that it was no longer possible to make peace with the Kachāri, he advised all the Bhuyāns surrounding him to leave their territories and retreat gracefully to the immediate north of the Brahmaputra, where some Bhuyāns were ruling. This was done in 1516-17, and it marks the termination of Bhuyāship on the southern bank of the river in the middle of Assam leaving no vestige of any political power with these chiefs. Sankaradeva and his retinue stayed with the northern Bhuyāns only for a few months, when they found themselves open to the dangers of the expanding Koch power under Visvasimha. So they moved into the Āhom kingdom and stationed themselves at a place, Gāngmau, near modern Biswanāthghāt. But this place was within easy reach of the Koches as well as of the Daflās inhabiting the northern mountains. Finding this only to be a fix, they moved further east to the river island on the Brahmaputra known as Mājuli with the hope that waters would give them sufficient protection from all possible raids.

The Bhuyāns and Vaishnavas made their home at a place, Dhuwāhāt or Belaguri, which was washed away by the monsoon floods and erosions of the Brahmaputra nearly four centuries afterwards in 1915. They felt very secure in this place, and Sankaradeva's Order thrived luxuriantly. The greatest benefit of his here was the acquisition of his dearest disciple and chief apostle, Mādhavadeva. A Kāyastha youth of thirty-two, proud of his learning, and a staunch Sākta like Sankaradeva himself at an earlier point of time, Mādhava came in the

company of Rāmadāsa, his brother-in-law and Sankara's disciple, to challenge the new-fangled creed of the elderly Vaishnava. He soon found himself pitted against a very formidable opponent, who cut through every argument he put forth in defence of Saktism and blood sacrifices, which the latter very zealously prohibited. The duel of words raged with unabated fury for four hours and a half, till at last Sankaradeva cited the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, IV.39.24, saying :

> As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by the pouring of water only at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourished by putting food only in the stomach, so all gods and goddesses are propitiated only by the worship of Achyuta (Vishnu).

All of Mādhava's offensive against the ekasarana cult collapsed. He realised that Sankaradeva's was the proper stand, and fell at the latter's feet accepting him as his Master. His now became a life completely dedicated to the faith, the guru and the Order. Just sometime back he had his betrothal to the daughter of a Kāyastha living near the royal dockyard at Negheri. He took the help of a small subterfuge to break the marriage so that his services to the Order might not suffer. He left his household and took to living as a monk near the Master. Sankaradeva on his part had a great strength in this young scholar, who became such a close and sincere associate in all daily activities that the guru called him prāna-bandhava, a friend of the soul. Mādhavadeva had a silver tongue, and the music in the congregations now became the sweeter and gathered great volume. The fraternity of bhaktas expanded.

Sankaradeva's creed counted, in more ways than one, for a challenge to the age-old brahmanical sacredotalism. Bhakti is open to all, irrespective of any caste distinction. It gives the same religious footing to the brāhman and the pariah. Sankaradeva announced : chaṇḍāla paryanta kari hari-bhakti-adhikārī, 'Everyone down to the Chandāla has the right to a love of Hari.' One need not have to be a scholar in the big scriptures to offer his bhakti to the Supreme Being. Sankaradeva rendered the sacred books, the *Bhāgavata-purānā* and others, into very simple Assamese songs and verses, which brought piety to the very door of the lowest in society, because everyone could sing these songs and recite those poems, and enjoy doing so. The saint, moreover, declared that this simple singing and reciting and the sincere declaration of allegiance to the Lord could lead men to the attainment of final beatitude. Although he does not seem to have done away with such of the brahmanical rites as could be reconciled to the ekasarana doctrine, his teachings were found to be much disturbing to the existing priesthood, for the new religion brought up a new priesthood and to a great extent minimized the importance of the older religions oligarchy and even bypassed it in some respects. The non-vishnuite sects in particular were hard hit by the new challenge, and the significance of this fact in this land of tantricism need hardly be emphasized. The sectaries, thus affected, took up the challenge, and offered Sankaradeva open hostility by abusing and molesting his followers. They hurled stones and foul language at the Vaishnavas going along the road, and heaped abuses on their creed wherever else they could. Apart from the priesthood, who were economically affceted by the new

creed, there were the big brāhman scholars with proud titles and honours like Bhārati, Kandali, Upādhyāya, Mishra and Āchārya, who found their own reputation put to danger by the great fame which Sankaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's scholarship earned. The Vaishnavas had a confrontation with the pāshandas or tantric Buddhists also Sankaradeva made a poem 'Pāshanda-mardana' (the quelling of heretics), which effectively exposed these people and drove them off from the centre of activity of the Vaishnava fraternity. When the hostility within the Hindu fold increased to an unbearable extent, Sankaradeva arranged to meet the leading and scholarly brāhmans in a religious gathering at the residence of one of his relatives. There was a full-dress debate. By persuasive questioning, the saint made these scholars admit of his religious and philosophical position as correct even from the traditional point of view. The result of this encounter was an enhancement of the prestige of the saint and his following.

Thus suffering signal discomfiture on scholastic grounds, the priesthood did not declare a cessation of hostilities. They saw a ray of hope to put down the religious rebel in the Āhom rulers, who were still following the old faith they brought with them and were not hinduized. The priests approached King Suhummung (1497-1539) with the allegation that the Vaishnavas had tampered with their traditional religious practices, and tried to impress on the monarch that this would bring apace great calamity to his kingdom. The Svargadeva (the Āhom king) was possibly much alarmed at the reported disaffection among people in a part of his kingdom, which had of late assumed some strategic

importance because of the impending invasion of the Koches from the west and for the possible dangers from the Bhuyāns and the tribes, some of whom were earlier subjugated and some of whom lived along the northern hills. It is because of an unsettled political condition in this part of the kingdom that a special warden of the frontier had already in 1512 been stationed at a place, Phulbāri, with his jurisdiction extended in 1528 to Nārāyanpur.

The king passed immediate orders for a trial of the Vaishnava leader, who was speedily summoned to the capital to explain why he should not be punished for irreligious acts, which amounted to the propagation of Buddhist heterodoxy according to the reports. The trial, however, was very short and of a summary character. Sankaradeva was acquitted very honourably as nothing wrong was found in the principles professed and the practices sought to be propagated by him. The monarch was rather wroth with the priestly plaintiffs, who, he found, brought very wrong charges against a saintly person.

Even though the Bhuyāns in Sankaradeva's following had much earlier relinquished their political role, some of them had some sort of an administrative relation, perhaps by way of a meagre autonomy, with the Āhom rulers, for it was from the latter that Sankaradeva's cousin, Jagatānanda, got the epithet 'Rāmarāya' because of his religious propensities. Hari, Sankaradeva's son-in-law, is said to have commanded a hundred people, possibly meaning a hundred units of pāiks, that is, four hundred able-bodied citizens rendering military or other duties to the state. It is not known if there was any

machination behind the orders from the capital that all the Bhuyāns of Dhuwāhāt and Nārāyanpur should join an elephant-catching kheddā operation. The Bhuyāns seem not to have exerted themselves properly or, being inexperienced in such work, to have been unable to keep proper guard, for the wild elephants escaped from the enclosure through the area of their vigilance. Hari and Mādhavadeva were taken in chains by a Handiqui to the capital at Gadgāon. They were tried and found guilty. Hari was put to the executioner's sword. Mādhavadeva, apparently but a mendicant, was detained being bound for good conduct. He made his living by begging in the nearby villages, and sometimes recited the Rāmāyana to the royal officers. After about six months he was released, and he walked all the way to Dhuwāhāt and gave the Master news of Hari's execution. This brought great dejection to the saint, who decided that life in the Āhom state was no longer possible for them.

King Visvasimha of Koch-Behār died in 1534 A.D., and his son Malladeva ascended the throne with a new name, Naranārāyana. Naranārāyan's brother Sukladhvaja or Chārāya was declared Yuvarāja or Chota Rajā, and he became also the commander of the Koch army. Both the princely brothers had a good education at Varanasi, as a result of which Naranārāyana could compose hymns in Sanskrit and Chilārāya could write the Sāravati commentary on Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*. They were also patrons of art and literature. In 1546 Chilārāya led a considerable army into the Āhom kingdom in order to fulfil an unfulfilled wish of Visvasimha. There were several battles at several places, in all of which the Āhoms generally suffered reverses. The next year the Koch general moved up to

Nārāyanpur and fortified that village. The Āhom king Suklenmung (1539-52) thereupon camped on a small river in the locality behind the encamped Koches, thus forcing the latter to take the offensive. The Koch force was virtually annihilated; the generalissimo had to fly for his life.

It was at this juncture that Sankaradeva and his followers made good their escape into Kāmarupa now under Naranārāyana. The saint had already been much impressed by the information how enlightened and liberal were the Koch king and his general. It was also very well known that the Kāmarupa Bhuyāns, who had only hostile relations with Visvasimha, now came to make peace with his sons and agreed to serve in their army or otherwise. One of these Bhuyāns, Gābharu-khān, took the consent of the Koch king and advanced with a small contingent of soldiers as far as the Salā outpost of the Āhoms. Sankaradeva, other Bhuyāns and Vaishnavas got this news, hurried to leave Dhuwāhāt, putting all their belongings into a number of boats. Gābharu-khān provided all of them with military escort till the fugitives were safe within Koch territories. The party stayed in several places for short durations, and finally settled at Chunporā in the modern town of Barpetā.

One of the first things to have been done by Sankaradeva at this place is the production of his first extant play, *Vipra - patni - prasāda* (Offerings of brāhman ladies to Krishna), in which bhakti is extolled at the cost of sacrifices as religious practice, and which appears to be a reply to the scathing criticism of sacredotalists of Dhuwāhāt. He now began to attract people to his sect from far and near. One of the best acquisitions in this respect was a

rich and talented merchant, Bhavānanda, who was rechristened by the guru as Nārāyana and became known as Thākur Ātā. He was a resourceful man and brought many a neophyte to Sankaradeva.

The saint moved his abode to two other places and finally made his permanent establishment at Pātbāusi which is still greatly adored as the place of the guru's residence for the last eighteen or twenty years of his life. His life in the Koch kingdom is marked by a comparative calm, which gave him the opportunity to fulfil the mission of his life to the greatest measure possible. All his major literary works including four of his remaining dramas (*Rukmini-harana*, *Pārijāta-harana*, *Kāliya-damana* and *Keli-gopāla*), the adaptations of several sections of the *Bhagavata-purana* and the Uttarakānda of the Ramayana were done in this place. His very popular work *Kirtana-ghoshā*, was also brought to completion. His doctrinal treatise in Sanskrit, *Bhakti-ratnākara*, was also written here. Among the new followers who joined him now were Dāmodaradeva (1488-1598) and Harideva (1493-1568), who later formed two schisms, and the good poet, Ananta Kandali, all these three being brāhmans. A Kachāri Rajā, whose name is unfortunately not mentioned was given ordination.

From Pātbāusi Sankaradeva set out in about 1550 on his second pilgrimage, this time extending only as far as Puri. Prior to this the Koch commander-in-chief, Chilārāya, happened to see Kamalapriyā alias Bhuvanesvari, the beautiful daughter of Sankaradeva's cousin, Rāmarāya, and married her in a place later known as Rāmarāya-kuthi, lying on the western border of the Goalpara district. The saint took about one hundred and twenty bhaktas with him

and started his sojourn outside one fine Agrahāyana morning and reached back home the following Vaisākha. Some biographers would like us to believe that at Navadvipa on his way or at Puri he had an encounter with Shri Chaitanya; but this appears to be only a figment of pious imagination, while some old writers have tried to bring in Rāmānanda (who had already died as early as 1421). Harivyāsa (possibly meaning Harivyāsa Muni, head of the Nimbārka ascetics and a contemporary of Vallabha and Chaitanya, who wrote hymns of a samkirtana type for his sect) and even some mythological figures! The biographers also hold that on his way to Puri via Gayā, Sankaradeva visited Kabir's math, where he met Kabir's daughter's daughter. Tradition is at variance in considering Kamāli as Kabir's daughter by a woman, Loi; and it is silent about any issue from Kamāli. The Assamese biographers make Sankaradeva consider this mystic poet of Northern India a kevala bhakta, a strict monotheist, in spite of his being a Muslim by birth and upbringing. Kabir was a bhakta but was influenced by Sufism and monistic Vedānta. He was a mystic, seeking communion with transcendent Brahman. The monistic atmosphere of Sankara's works can scarcely be doubted; with idealism moderated but little, be combined the emotionalism of deep devotion. Like Kabir, who is called nigurā (preceptor-less), the Assam saint had no spiritual preceptor. Kabir sought to set at naught the differences between Hindus and Muslims. Sankaradeva did not venture to pull down caste distinctions, but entertained converts from all castes including tribals and a Muslim tailor, Chāndsāi by name, who is considered to have ascended high on the ladder of spiritual attainment.

Returning from Puri Sankaradeva resumed his customary work of holding congregations, receiving neophytes and writing books. He believed he could now depend on the enlightened character of King Naranārāyana and Dewan Chilārāya for a peaceful atmosphere of work. He saw his Vaishnava movement in full glory and his Order in full development. But the fast growing popularity of the new faith invited fresh hostility. Those of the old priestly order who found it difficult to tolerate Sankaradeva's teachings made very teasing doggerels, stressing the anti-traditional traits of his school, and abused the good monarch Naranārāyana's ears with greatly exaggerated accounts of his activities. The king was highly incensed at such disturbing report and made haste to send a battalion of sepoys to drag down the religious rebel in heavy chains. "I will kill Sankara", he said thumping on the finely decorated pillow on the throne, "make a drum with his skin and beat it with his bones taken out of the body." The saint got scent of this king's unkind action, and managed to flee from his house before the sepoys could reach Pātbāusi. Two of his disciples, Nārāyana Thākur and Gokulachānd, were apprehended, taken to the capital and put to the severest forms of physical torture in an attempt to find out Sankaradeva's hiding place and to have the admission that Sankaradeva was engaged in anti-social activities. But the two Vaishnavas would not inform where the Master was or say that he has done wrong things. They were, therefore, bartered to some Bhutanese traders for horses. But the Bhutanese were greatly impressed by the godliness of the two persons and released them. The king's policeman, who was in charge of the two accused, paid a hundred

rupees in this behalf and became a convert.

Sankaradeva came out from underground and moved freely for only two months and a half, when the king once again was instigated to send men to arrest him. Rājaguru Kanthabhushana and Sankaradeva's son, Ramānanda, who was in the employ of Chilārāya, informed the commander-in-chief of this step. Chilāraya sent his own men to Pātbāusi to take away the Master in a boat to his own abode, Phulbāri.

Naranārāyana now asked his brother to hand over the saint to him and have the assurance that no harm would be done to the holy man before a trial was properly held. Sankaradeva accordingly presented himself at the Koch royal court with none for his help except his personal attendant while Chilārāya threw a chain of his horsemen to carry the progress of this historic meeting in relay at very short intervals. Sankaradeva proceeded to the durbar with his famous hymns in the totaka metre, *madhu-dānava-dāraṇa-deva-varam*, on his lips as he ascended the steps at the entrance. His majestic presence made such a stir all around that the king ordered for a comfortable seat to be placed for the Vaishnava in his own front, although that was not till then an accepted practice. Before any altercation could begin the saint sang a bargita, *nārāpana kāhe bhakti karu tcrā*, beseeching kindness to all beings, who were, as it were, the very body of Lord Nārāyana, followed by an eulogy of the king's prowess. The king himself had written a few lines by way of commentary on eight original Sanskrit verses. These were shown to Sankaradeva, who gave such a lucid exposition of the whole thing that everybody was powerfully amazed at his intellectual height and width. Naranārāyana

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was instantaneouly overpowered by the saint's radiating personality, and eager to make amends for his earlier harshness, he wanted to know what he could do for the holy guest. Sankaradeva replied that all he wanted was the opportunity to reply to the allegations of the other camp. The king proposed that the saint should come every morning to his court to meet the arguments of the old priestly scholars, giving only the afternoons to deliberations at Chilārāya's court. Sankaradeva agreed, and each morning brought him signal victory over the opponents, and his new songs presented at the court made such loving impression on the king and the courtiers that all of them looked forward to hear him pour out his mellifluous voice in songs and his deep wisdom in the form of irresistible arguments to rise triumphant in each day's full dress debate. The king, firmly convinced of the profoundity of the saint's learning and the sublimity of his faith, and the teacher became great friends now and remained so till the last. In spite of himself the Vaishnava had each day to carry to his camp a rich load of royal presents. The priesthood found itself completely discomfited and entreated Sankaradeva not to lay waste its means of livelihood. He assured it that he was no enemy of Brāhmans, but sounded the warning that he must needs take up the challenge in case it was thrown at his face. All the same, the hostile pandits did not give up teasing the Vaishnavas. But with both the king's and the commander-in-chief's friendship and support at his back, he and his followers felt completely secure in their movements, and the neo-Vaishnava Order thrived very vigorously in Koch-Behār and Kāmarpura.

Since after this very happy conciliation between the

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king and the religious teacher, the latter seems to have played the shuttle on several occasions between Koch-Behār, the seat of royalty, and Pātbāusi, the centre of the Vaishnava movement. When in the capital, Sankaradeva used to stay at Phulbāri and be present during day-time in Naranārāyana's assembly. Chilārāya, however, built him a small sattra near the capital, which became later known as Bhelā or Bhelādangā-sattra. The Master was very old now, having crossed his century quite some years back. When, therefore, Chilārāya wanted the Assamese rendering of a Sanskrit book, called *Janma-purāna*, to be made, Sankaradeva had the adaptation in verses done by his able disciple, Mādhavadeva. It was, again, at the request of the same royal personage that the Vaishnava leader had a forty-yard-long piece of cloth woven by the weavers of the village Tātikuchi (now Barpetā), depicting the early activities of Krishna in Vrindāvana ending in the killing of Kamsa. This piece of tapestry became known as vrindāvani vastra. At the king's court there was the scholarly confrontation with a pandit, Kavichandra Dvija, coming from Santipur (Navadvipa) and his contingent of sixty scholars. These scholars contended that being a non-brāhman Sankaradeva ought not to have touched the *Bhāgavata-purāna*. The disputation ended in Sankaradeva's victory. He is said to have made a drama *Kamsa-vadha* at Pātbāusi ; but of this only the songs are now to be traced.

In the month of Phālguna, 1489 Saka, Sankaradeva performed his last journey from Pātbāusi to Koch-Behār, staying with Mādhavadeva at latter's sattra at Ganakkuchi for one night, when he had the last heart-to-heart talk with this dearest disciple of his and asked him to bear

the torch which he had lighted, assuring him that he would never leave Mādhava alone but would be found readily in his poetical works. The next morning he said good-bye to his loving ollowers and sailed by boat down the Brahmaputra.

Reaching Bhelādangā, Sankaradeva stayed there for six months, visiting Naranārāyana's court in the fore-noon and Chilārāya's in the afternoon. He was extremely oid now, and his swan-song seems to have been the drama, *Rāma-vijaya* (The Exploits of Rāma), written and produced at the behests of Chilārāya with the help of the latter's nartakas or actors. The play bears the date of 1490 Saka, the last year of the Master's life, and the mention of the commander-in-chief, who is called nripatipradhāna.

The end of the Master's life was now fast approaching. Of his three sons the second, Kamalalochana, had already died; the eldest, Ramānanda, was still serving in Chilārāya's office at Koch Behār, while the youngest, Haricharana, not a very promising child, was with his mother, Kālindi. But the saint looked forward to Mādhavadeva as his proper spiritual successor and had already expressly said so. It is held in some quarters that Naranārāyana requested Sankaradeva to render him ordination into the neo-Vaishnava cult, that the Saint declined this as he did not think it proper to accept practising brāhman priests and kings as neophytes, for they would surely violate the injunction of ekasarana on some occasion or other, and that the king's insistence on his getting the ordination was responsible for hastening the saint's death. Whatever that be, Sankaradeva's passing away came of a sudden. his long and eventful career came to an end on Thursday,

the 7th or the 21st Bhādra (September), 1490 Saka/ 1569 A.D. His last physical remains were consigned to fire on the banks of the small river, Torochā, the king having sent sandal wood, butter and other things for the funeral.

III

SANKARADEVA'S VAISHNAVA ORDER

SANKARADEVA nominated Mādhavadeva as his successor to hold charge of the Order. The latter set up his sattra at Sundaridiyā (Barpetā) where he made his chief work, *Nāmaghoshā,* among other compositions. From time to time he visited different places round about his sattra, and erected a temple primarily for the purpose of dramatic performances but this soon grew into a sattra, the Barpetā-sattra. The hostile people were busy all the time, bringing allegations of broadcasting a corrupt religion against Mādhavadeva in the court of Raghudevanārāyana (1581-1603), the son of Sukladhvaja, who had earlier quarrelled with his uncle Naranārāyana after his father's death and declared himself independent as the king of Kāmarupa (the eastern half of the Koch state built by Visvasimha, Naranārāyana and Chilārāya). A contingent of sepoys raided the Barpetā-sattra, seized the petty belongings of the cloistered Vaishnavas and carried Mādhavadeva and some of the monks there in boats to the capital at Vijaypur. But before the saint could be summoned for trial in the open court, the hostile pandits withdrew their charges ; Mādhavadeva was honourably acquitted, and the effects of the monks were returned to them. Soon after, however, the whimsical king sent Mādhavadeva a writ, asking him to leave Barpetā as early as possible and settle at Hājo with its Hayagriva-Mādhava temple. But here the saint

Mādhava attracted more people than the god Mādhava ; and seeing herein the possibility of fresh troubles, he hastily decided to leave Raghudeva's kingdom, and accordingly crossed the border over to Koch-Behār, where Naranārāyana's son, Lakshminārāyana (1587-1627) was now ruling. There too he did not find a quiet life as many people found it difficult to accept Sankaradeva's creed, and particularly because an officer, a qāji, could not take kindly to him on account of the Vaishnavas' refusal to interdine with people outside of their fraternity. Mādhavadeva was confronted with harsh controversies at the royal court ; but the profoundity of his learning came to good account in this impasse, and Lakshminārāyana declared the new faith, with two sattras in the capital, the state religion. The saint like the Master died in Koch-Behār in 1596 A.D.

Sankaradeva delegated to his brāhman follower, Dāmodaradeva, the power of administering ordination, as this was considered expedient particularly in the case of brāhman neophytes. Immediately after the death of the guru, however, there was a 'rift in the lute', and Dāmodaradeva seceded from the main order, and formed a schism. It was represented to Pariksitanārāyana of Kāmarupa (1603-1616) that this brāhman was bringing pollution on the country by accepting a sudra's faith and by crying against the worship of all gods and goddesses. The king ordered externment of the saint, who made his way to the Koch-Behār capital and built himself the Vaikunthapur-sattra there. It is remarkable that the three first great Vaishnava āchāryas of Assam died in Koch-Behār, which, by the logic of political history, is to-day not with this State.

Another brāhman dissenter like Dāmodaradeva was

Harideva, who claims only a few sattras of his following, confined to the present-day district of Kamrup. Sankaradeva's family priest and friend, Rāmarāma, remained by his side all through his life, and the family springing from Rāmarāma remained loyal to the Order, has been supplying Pātbāusi and Barpetā-sattras with Superiors.

Mādhavadeva sent out holy men as apostles of the bhakti faith, the chief among them being Gopāladeva of Bhavānipur, Padma Ātā, and a second Gopāladeva better known as Vamshigopāla. The nomination of Vamshigopāla, a brāhman, was approved by Dāmodaradeva also. These three apostles and their deputies established sattras mostly in Asama, that is, the Āhom kingdom ; and some of their sattras are very rich, and claim each a large and widespread laity. Mādhavadeva's sister's son, Rāmacharana, and Mathurādāsa were left in charge of the temples built by the saint at Sundaridiyā and Barpetā. The three sons of Sankaradeva died prematurely, and his grandsons, Purushottama and Chaturbhuja, and the latter's wife, Kanakalatā, appointed their deputies, who organised sattras in various places; and these sattras, almost a church by themselves, look up for inspiration to Bardowā, the birthplace of the saint. Dāmodaradeva appointed three nominees, who stayed in sattras in Kāmarupa, while Vanamālideva, a brāhman monk staying at his Vaikunthapur-sattra, migrated to the east, and established a powerful sattra (Dakhinpāt) under the patronage of the ruling Āhom king. Some sattras were brought into being by persons connected with Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva; and some of those set up by the divines mentioned above branched off each into several petty establishments.

Thus the three Assamese States of Eastern India,

namely, Asama, Kāmarupa and Koch-Behār, were covered by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth with a network of these Vaishnava establishments, and almost the whole Hindu population was now divided among them. Some of the adherents of the Vaishnava Order have made serious departures from the original tenets of the faith, or have relapsed into heterogenous doctrines discarded by the gurus. Others again have carried the puritanic zeal of the new faith very far indeed. The followers of Gopāladeva of Bhavānipur formed into a school, characterised by catholicity and a democratic outlook and freedom from the tyranny of creeds. It particularly thrived and acquired large followings in the north-eastern parts of Assam with their predominatingly Tibeto-Burman population, and reclaimed large numbers of people from animistic practice. The followers of the Mowāmarā or Māyāmarā mahanta within Gopāladeva's Order rose in revolt as one man against royal oppression (1769), and succeeded in subverting Āhom power for a time. The history of Assam Vaishnavism is one of many conflicts and persecutions. The course of political history of this eastern part of India also has been changing considerably from time to time. But the Renaissance, which had its beginnings in the activities of Sankaradeva, has wrought itself into fulfilment in many ways, and marked out a definite place for Assam in the cultural map of India.

IV

TENETS AND PRACTICES OF THE FAITH

The *Bhāgavata-purāna*, the *Bhagavadgitā* and the 'Sahasra-nāma' section of the *Padma-purāna* are popularly considered to be the authorities from which Sankaradeva accepted the main articles of his faith, namely, satsamga (the assembly of bhaktas as a means of bhakti), ekasarana (shelter in one god, Visnu-Krishna, alone), and nāma (kirtana or prayer, as the main form of devotion). While the *Bhāgavata-purāna* and the *Bhagavadgitā*, and other vishnuite purānas and texts also have been adapted into Assamese or cited as authorities by the Vaishnava writers, the writings of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva and a few other works approved by them or the Order provide the gospel and have a canonical authority. The *Bhāgavata-purāna* and the *Bhagavadgitā* alone among Sanskrit works are used in the ceremonial readings. In the explanations of these two books, the 'Bhāgavata-bhāvārtha-dipikā' and the 'Subodhini' commentaries of Sridhara-svāmi have been used from the beginning with such slight moderation as might have been found necessary to suit the peculiar tenets of the faith.

Sankaradeva's creed is popularly known as mahā-purushiyā dharma, the word 'mahāpurushiyā' being an imitation of Sanskrit 'mahāpauruṣika' (*Bhāg.-p.*, 1.14.37), explained as mahāpuruṣho viṣhṇus tadīya mahāpauruṣhika vaikuṇṭhāṇāthānucharaḥ ; by Sridhara; (*Bhāg.-p.*, 2.1.10),

explained as mahapuruṣo viṣhṇus tadīyaḥ by Sridhara, and rendered as mahāpuruṣar sevaka by Mādhavadeva, *Nāmaghoshā*, 650), meaning that the worshipful is the transcendent Vishnu, the controller of prakriti and purusha (prakṛti puruṣa duiro niyantā mādhava, *Nāmaghoshā*. 405), and known as Brahman, paramātman and bhagavat (*Nāmaghoshā*, 176; *Bhag.* p., 1.2.11).

The official name of the bhakti creed of Sankaradeva is ekasarana nāmadharma, and this explains its cardinal principles, which enjoin the worship of one god, that is, Vishnu, especially in the incarnation of Krishna, and interdicts the votaries from the worship of any other deity, and indicates its main form, which consists of the utterance of the holy names of the god, in the singing of songs in his glorification. The words of the Lord in what is called the charama sloka or final verse by the school of Rāmānuja in the *Bhagavadgitā*, demanding unswerving devotion to him (sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekam śaraṇaṁ vraja, 18.66), are to be remembered. Bhattadeva, a brāhman author, cites relevant authorities to say that a votary should not make offerings to the five gods in panchayajna, for that would vitiate his ekasarana, but make offerings to Vishnu alone, and that would bring satisfaction to all the gods (*Bhāg.-p.*, 4.31.14). The bhakta is not to cast either adoring or hateful glances on the idols of other gods; nor should he visit places of their worship (Sankaradeva, *Bhāg.-p*, 2). No hostility, however, is to be exhibited by him towards the adherents of other creeds while engaging himself in the worship of Vishnu, who alone is considered as being suddha-sattva, of pure existence (nārāyaṇakalāh santa bhajanti hi anasūyavaḥ, (*Bhāg.-p.*, 1.2.26). It is, moreover, a religion of implicit love

and faith, bhakti; and love in order to be true to itself and its object must be avyabhichārini, chaste even as a chaste wife; it must not have behind it the idea of securing a return, not even the highest beatitude (ahaitukī avyavahitā yā bhaktiḥ puruṣottame, *Bhāg.-p.*, 3.29.12). The ideal bhakta is, therefore, no aspirant to the release of his soul (muktito nispṛiha).

There are nine modes of bhakti (śravana, kīrtana, smarana, padasevana, archana, vandana, dāsya, sakhya, ātmanivendana). Of these Sankaradeva considered śravana and kirtana to be sufficient as the religious endeavour of man towards the highest consummation possible. They are accessible to the highest and the lowest alike, and no rigid theocratic laws are to be followed by the votary; and much of the vagaries of form and formality is also reduced to the minimum. A novice (prākrita bhakta) may, if he likes, worship Vishnu-Krishna in an image, for archana is admitted as one of the nine modes of bhakti; but the most palpable image of the Lord is no stone or clay, but his ardent bhakta, whose company is to be sought by all means. One who spurns the bhakta and goes to seek salvation from an idol is 'worse than a bull' (garuto adhama, Sankaradeva, Kirtana-ghoshā 3.61; sa eva gokharah, (*Bhāg.*-p., 10.84.13). The Lord, moreover, has no other image than the Word (mantramūrtim amūrtikam, *Bhāg.-p.*, 1.5.38). The ideal bhakta, therefore, worships the Lord within with but what his heart can offer (Sankaradeva *Bhakti-ratnakara*, 9, citing (*Bhāg.-p.*, 11.27.15). Like a mystic, Sankaradeva realised that God lived broadcast in the general hearts of all creatures. It is only when we miss this truth that we go to seek him outside (*Kirtana-ghoshā*, 8.11). Idol-worship does not play any important

part in Sankaradeva's system; and this small bit of ritualism can also be done away with if the devotee wishes. The activities in the sattras consist of prayer services, divided into a day-long programme of three to fourteen parts, each called a prasanga or nāma-prasanga. These are held in the congregation hall (kirtana-griha, nāmghar), where the object of veneration is the guru-āsana, with some works of the Masters in ancient folios. And this is how nāmadharma is performed. The secret formula confided by the Superior to the novice at the time of initiation into bhakti consists of four names of the Lord : rāma-krishna-hari-nārāyana. The initiate must cultivate intimate faith in, and resign himself to the power of, four vastus, or reals, which are 1. nāma, the sacred name of Lord God; 2. deva, Vishnu-Krishna, the sole refuge of the jivas; 3. guru, the religious preceptor, who directs the initiate's faltering steps to the Way unto the Lord; and 4. bhakta, the intimate fraternity in whose company to seek out the Lord of Love. Of the different attitudes of bhakti Sankaradeva advocated dāsya, or servitude, and not madhura (erotic love), sakhya (comradeship), or vātsalya (filial feelings). The votary is to consider himself as the servant and God as the Master; and servant is to know none other than God as claiming his all-out devotion. The Rādhā-Krishna cult is not acknowledged in this system of Vaishnavism, nor is any shakti (energy represented in a female form) of Vishnu to be recognised in his worship.

Sankaradeva was a non-brāhman, but accepted brāhmans as his disciples, who made such obeisance to him as a spiritual guru was due to receive. This was one of his actions that could not be approved by the orthodox

supporters of casteism, and Sankaradeva had to render an explanation for this in the Koch court. Dāmodaradeva also was taken to book for accepting a sudra's religion. The explanation offered was that a sudra might be debarred from rendering vedic mantras to other people, but is free to give nāmamantra to any person. In Sankaradeva's system, therefore, we find brāhman disciples of sudra teachers, and even people who are untouchables in other parts of India in the following of brāhman mahantas. We also find a brāhman occupying Superiorship of a sattra in succession to a sudra. Nobody, on the other hand, is to be considered as unfit for securing initiation in the faith on caste considerations. Among the disciples of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva were Chāndsāi and Jayahari, both Musalmāns; Govinda, a Gāro; Jayānanda, a Bhutiyā; Mādhava of Jayanti of the Hirā or potters' profession; Srirāma, believed to have been a Kaivarta; and Dāmodara, a Baniyā. A later Superior, Srirāmadeva, administered ordination to some Nocte Nagās. Āhoms, Koches, Miris, Kachāris, Marāns and people of many other tribes were also freely converted to the Vaishnavism of Sankaradeva's Order. It is the catholic outlook of this religion that could thus unify different peoples into one spiritual fraternity, and also achieve a cultural synthesis.

Sankaradeva was a house-holder, and Mādhavadeva lived a life of celibacy. One need not forsake the world, they taught, to find God. It was probably the ideal of Mādhavadeva's individual life that brought into being an order of ascetics (kevaliyā), who formed the innermost circle within the sattras. But there could be married persons as well as monks in these establishments as divines or ordinary clerics. There is no order of nuns, and women in general are not

allowed to mix with the men in congregations. There are, of course, instances of women holding the position of Superiors. Sankaradeva's grand-daughter-in-law, Kanakalatā, made a definite contribution to the growth of the sattra system when she organised the Bardowā group therein and on her own appointed twelve deputies, all men of course, as heads of sattras.

V

SOCIAL REORGANISATION

SANKARADEVA did not, or could not, do away with the caste divisions but the bhakti movement did tone down much of the stigma attached to such discriminations. In the Vaishnava congregations all members of the fraternity were equal. The prayer services and the reading of sacred texts could be conducted by persons able to do it, irrespective of his social standing in the old scale. The offerings to the deity could be distributed in the assembly by men of any caste within the circle of bhaktas. Notwithstanding persecution from the old orthodoxy, people flocked to Sankaradeva's side to listen to the message of Love, and met there as equal sons of God.

Sankaradeva thus effected a great change and cleansing of hearts. He also taught people personal cleanliness and correct social behaviour. Ever since the day of receiving ordination, the life of a bhakta becomes a life of dedication. Along with the initiation he is taught the ways of a clean life, inward and outward, in minute details, to which he has to adhere with the greatest possible care. General sadāchāra or good conduct was for the most part outward cleanliness (saucha-suddhi), maintained by an ample use of water; and an initiate was always to be distinguished by his behaviour in this regard. Thorough cleansing of the body before the meals was an indispensable part of the bhakta's daily routine. When a person was received into

the faith, he had to give up old unclean ways—the taking of intoxicants, the keeping of unclean animals and birds, the cultivation of poppy for opium. Although the killing of animals was deprecated as a mark of general kindness to all living beings, the monks as well as lay disciples could take fish and venisson. The great teacher that Sankaradeva was thus held up an ideal of balanced life, not of indulgence and license, but, at the same time, not of renunciation and self-mortification. By not admitting Rādhā or any other female complement of the worshipful in course of the worship, and by excluding women from the quiet life in the sattras and the general congregations, Sankaradeva saved his own Order from the possibilities of degradation.

The sattras played a great rôle in the social life of the people, and as a social force this institution was greatly strengthened by the acceptance of the Vaishnava faith by the Āhom kings and nobles. The Hindu Assamese had now two unavoidable affiliations, that of temporal allegiance to the State and the king, and that of spiritual submission to this religion and a guru, who is the Superior of a sattra. The popular saying, rajār khājanā gurur kar, 'rent for the lands to the king, and holy tax to the guru' (in a sattra), indicates how conscious people were of this double allegiance binding people's life. The spiritual obligation gave people a dignity, a balanced view of life and an attention for details, and made them God-fearing and moral beings. The acceptance of the faith indicated to them that others of it were to be treated as equals rather than as victims of social stratification. In Assam toleration became the rule rather than the exception. There were, of course, hot and bitter moments of history when interference in matters religious was met even with

the clash of arms; but this heat and bitterness came as the ultimate result of the admission of certain exotic elements into the religious life of Assam at a moment when this indigenous Vaishnavism with its ramifications became a vital and all pervading force. It was seen during the insurrection of the Mowāmariyā Vaishnavas in the latter part of the eighteenth century that while the royal camp constantly suffered from land-slides, betrayals, treachery and such other lapses, the Vaishnava rebels, mostly uneducated rustics, acted as one man and maintained a high moral tone, inspired by the sincerest adherence to the cause of the guru.

With the organisation of sattras came their decentralised replica, the institution of village nāmghar, something like the parish church. From the beginning the nāmghar formed the hub of all village activities. It was the village club and theatre. It exercised a close spiritual control over all members of the community, and held them back from many an evil act. In fact, this institution might be called the village parliament, and a parliament run too on broad democratic principles. It was the village court; trials of disputes and crimes were held in it, and no one dared disregard the judgment pronounced by the elders of the village. An excommunication could be decreed by this village panchāyat, and is the worst thing that a man in society could dread in those days. Only difficult cases were referred to the Superior of the sattra to which the delinquent belonged, or to the government judiciary. Thus through the twin institutions of sattra and nāmghar Assamese society was neatly organised; and the moral tone of the people with such vigilance all around was bound to be very fine indeed.

VI

VEDANTIC THOUGHT

For an account of the theology and philosophy, ethics and religious doctrines of Assam Vaishnavism, we have to turn mainly to Sankaradeva's *Bhakti-ratnākara*, a work in Sanskrit, beside his other works in Assamese and the writings of other Assamese Vaishnavas. But it is not a work on theology and much less, of philosophy, properly so called. This doctrinal treatise, however, exhibits a wide learning, limited only by a sectarian view, and a fine analytic scholarship at work. It is also interesting to note how Sankara caught hold of works of such a variety of forms. And the materials collected are always set forth in a finely systematic manner. Sankaradeva and others of his school interpreted the *Bhāgavata-purāna* in the local language, and let it out as the secret of the Vedānta (vedāntaro guhya). Several early schools of Vaishnavism had prepared each a commentary on the *Brahma-sutras*. Sankaradeva of Assam and Chaitanya of Bengal did not, however, deem it necessary to follow the example of these sects. Sankaradeva in his *Bhakti-ratnākara*, Mādhavadeva in his *Nāmaghoshā*, and Bhattadeva in his *Bhakti-viveka* cite the authority of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* itself (12.13.15) to say that this purāna is the essence of all Vedānta (sarva-vedānta-sāram). Jiva Gosvāmi, the philosophical apologist of Chaitanyaism, declares that the purāna is Vyāsa's own commentary of the aphorisms of Vedānta. The verse cited by Sankara-

deva and others need not, however, be taken as a reference to the systematized philosophy of the *Brahma-sutras* as much as to the Vedantic thought in its process of growth as in the Upanishads. In *Bhakti-ratnākara*, as elsewhere, Sankaradeva relies absolutely upon the authority of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, the *Bhagavadgitā*, other vishnuite purānas and sectarian texts.

Sankaradeva nowhere tries to work out an independent system of thought; and his philosophical views have, therefore, to be culled and put together before we can give it a name and a place in the history of Indian thought. The philosophic teaching of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, as Farquhar points out, "stands nearer to Sankara's system than to the theistic Sānkhya which dominates earlier Purānic works." In the interpretation of the purāna, moreover, Sankaradeva and other Assamese Vaishnavas greatly leaned back upon the commentary of Sridhara-svāmi, the mahant of the Sankarite (advaitin) Govardhanamatha at Puri (c. 1400), combining and tempering the severe monistic idealism of advaita with the emotionalism of bhakti. It is thus natural that Sankaradeva and others of his school should tend to be monists.

Brahman is the origin, the support, and the end of the world. It is both the efficient as well as the material cause (nimitta, upādāna kārana) of the world. Just as earthen pots are nothing different from clay, just as gold ornaments are nothing different from gold, the world is born out of, and ends in, Brahman. The world is substantially Brahman, and depends on it. But the analogy of clay and pots and of gold and gold ornaments, which is brought in to uphold that kārya (effect) is no different from kārana (cause), and the presenting of the jivas as

parts of Brahman (brahma-aṁśa jīva) as Sankaradeva does in places may tend to *parināmavāda* (evolution of a like object from a like object), which is ultimately not to be admitted. The persisting analogy put forth is that of a rope appearing as a serpent to the casual view, which signifies vivarta (phenomenal appearance). Thus in Sankaradeva's system of thought māyāvada or idealism, which was discarded by the main schools of Vaisnavism, persists, and goes along with bhakti.

Underlying the false world of appearances, Brahman lends a semblance of reality (sadābhāsa). The world that is unreal (asat), being connected with nescience (avidyā-yukta), only appears as real, being born out of the real Brahman (asanta jagatakhāna tomāta udbhava bhaila, santa hena prakāse sadāya). This is adhyāsa, the appearance of a thing where it is not. The false appearances are made possible through māyā, which is explained as a power of God, that conceals vastu (object) and projects avastu (non-object) to view (avastuka dekhāwaya vastuka āvari). Practically no distinction is made among māyā, avidyā and prakriti, although Sridhara says that the same prakrīti is called avidyā with āvarana-sakti (concealment) and as the upādhi of jivas, and again called māyā with vikshepa-sakti (projection) and as the upādhi of Isvara. When avidyā, which conceals ātman (soul) to view, dissolves, the jiva realises the self even as one's ornaments on the neck would come to one's view. Māyā and prakriti are often represented as the shakti and consort of the Lord. God pervades the world, but is not touched by its merits and demerits (Sankaradeva, *Bhāg.-p.*, 2), nor is he exhausted in the world, but creates, maintains and destroys it through māyā residing in him.

In the 22nd chapter of *Bhatki-ratnākara*, the difference between Isvara and jiva is brought out. Isvara is the controller of māyā through his power of consciousness (vidyāśaktyā māyāniyantā), and jiva is ever mortified under the pressure of māyā. Jiva can be released only when it attains knowledge through the love of God. He cites from a work, *Yogasāra* to say that jiva is unchangeable, all-pervasive and full of calm (avikāri vibhuḥ śāntaḥ), and nothing apart from paramātman. Being enveloped in misapprehension and ignorance (bhrāntyajñānāvrita), jiva does not know itself as such.

It should, therefore, be the endeavour of jiva to free itself from the fetters of māyā. Sankaradeva held bhakti to be the means by which to attain release. Isvara-bhakti leads to jnāna, perfect knowledge, and jnāna leads to release. Jnāna is considered here as a bye-product or a natural result of bhakti, and moksha (release) comes as a corollary. But the ideal bhakta would never seek or accept nirvāna or any other form of moksha as much as he would beseech the Lord to bestow on him the unending privilege of bhakti; only let there be no vagaries of māyā, manas (the mind) and ahankāra (the ego).

Sankaradeva also accepted the emotionalised Sānkhya as well as Yoga physiology and psychology as set forth in the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, and both these systems are explained in relation and as helps to bhakti.

Hitherto no system of Indian thought seems to have made a deep impression upon the people of Assam. With the inculcation of Vaishnavism upon them, the Vedānta was imbued into the general consciousness of the people and became a common property. Although generally in their poetry, Sankaradeva, Mādhavadeva and others kept

the dry dicta of philosophy at a distance inasmuch as that poetry was for the ordinary and unlettered also, they have in many places wrought Vedantic thought into simple and lucid lines, so that even the general run of monks in the sattras could render a verbal digest of it for the enlightenment and solace of the world-worn laity.

VII

A GREAT AGE IN LITERATURE

THERE WAS the efflorescence of a great literature in the wake of the Sankaradeva movement of Assam. Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva themselves composed a good number of songs, dramas, verse narratives and other types of literature, wherein they expounded and elaborated the teachings of the faith they sought to propagate. A host of poets, writers and scholars like Ananta Kandali, Rāma Sarasvati, Vaikunthanātha Kaviratna, Sridhara, Kandali, Gopāladeva of Bhavānipur, Rāmacharana Thākur, Daityāri Thākur, Gopalacharana Dvija, flocked under the banner of bhakti, and formed into a vigorous literary movement. It was the age of one ideal, that of bhakti; of one god, Vishnu-Krishna; of one leadership, that of Sankaradeva; of one book, the *Bhāgavata-purāna*. All other types of matter, almost invariably taken from some vishnuite text, were brought under the dictates of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*. The Vaishnava writers' adherence to the sanction at scriptural authority amounted to limitation upon their creative ability and a curb upon their poetic genius. None-the-less, the literary output of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva alone is considerable, and is characterised by a rare power of rendering the spirit of the original in unimpaired beauty and by occasional flights of creative imagination. Their literary works acted as the chief machinery of propaganda of the faith, and afforded both

enlightenment and pleasure to the people. Sankaradeva is said to have rendered eight out of the twelve books of the *Bhāgavatā-purāna*, and this was done at the teeth of much opposition. It was Rāmānanda of Northern India, we might remember, who mooted the idea of preaching in a modern Indian language. As a legacy from the Assamese poets preceding him, he received a literary form of language with much poise and beauty, as also a few verse-forms. The immediately preceding period of Assamese literature exhibited a zeal for story-telling, and the two Indian Epics and some tracts from the purānas were done into the language. But this period hardly represents a literary movement, a movement with a definite ideal. The age of Sankaradeva marks a literary and cultural resurgence.

In his early works, *Harischandra-upākhyāna* and *Rukmini-harana*, Sankaradeva exhibits the same narrative zeal as was evident in the preceding period of Assamese poetry. In his renderings from the *Bhāgavata-purāna* and other purānas no particular attention is paid to literary form, and in places remain 'formless fermenting verbiage', but the teaching of bhakti therein is not to be missed. The *Bhakti-pradipa* denounces the worship of other deities in preference to Krishna-bhakti. Each of the 25 sections of the *Kirtana-ghoshā* the most popular and important of Sankaradeva's works, contains several kirtana songs with refrains, goes to relate a story or expound a topic. The *Anādi-pātana* is an account of cosmology and cosmogony, philosophy and theology. *Gunamālā*, a tiny work of six kirtanas of jingling verses, is a remarkable feat of mental speed and brevity of expression.

Some of the writings of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva are complementary in character. Mādhavadeva

rendered the Bālakānda, while Sankaradeva makes an adaptation of the final kānda of the Rāmāyana, divesting it of all intervening episodes, and added them to the central four books translated by the predecessor, Mādhava Kandali. Sankaradeva composed 34 songs, later known as bargita, Mādhavadeva complementing them with 157 of his compositions. Sankaradeva's songs sing of the futility of human efforts, and urges upon listeners the need for bhakti; some of them are prayer songs, pure and simple, and didactic verses. Mādhavadeva's songs breathe an open-air atmosphere, and excel in the description of Krishna's childhood and the bringing out of the eternal mother in Yasodā. Both these saints wrote a number of songs called bhatimā (panegyrics) in praise of the worshipful Lord, Sankaradeva making two in praise of King Naranārāyana and Mādhavadeva one to his guru. The dramas (anka, nāta or nātaka, popularly ankiyā nāta) of both are a type by themselves, and do not follow any model, Sanskrit, Prākrit or otherwise. There are no act or scene-divisions in them. The sutradhāra, taken from the classical drama, is the central character, conducting the whole action with songs, dances and explanatory commentary. The plays are in an artificial literary dialect, used in the bargita and bhatimā songs also, later known as Brajāwali-bhāsā or Brajabuli with a queer mixture of Assamese, Maithili and Hindi and a tincture of other elements. A like idiom was used by the Vaishnava lyricists of Bengal and Orissa perhaps a little later. Sankaradeva has left us six ankas : *Patniprasāda*, *Kālidamana*, *Keligopāla*, *Rukminiharana*, *Pārijātaharana* and *Rāmavijava*. The younger poet differs from his master in his dramatic technique just a little, his playets (jhumurā) being more

operatic in pattern. As in his lyrics so in his plays he is preoccupied with the Krishna of Vrindāvana more than anything else. He wrote *Arjunabhanjana*, *Chordharā*, *Pimparāguchuwā*. *Bhumilutiwā* and *Bhojanavyavahāra*. four others, *Brahmāmohana*, *Bhusanaharana*. *Rāsajhumurā* and *Kotorākhelowā*. being also ascribed to him. He rendered only a small part of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* describing Yudhisthira's rājasuya. But the greatest contribution of this saint-poet to Assamese poetry and thought is the *Nāma-ghoshā*, which excels in giving lucid and musical expression to his inner experience as well.

The literature that was now born in the wake of the Vaishnava movement included many translations and adaptations from the two Epics, the *Bhagāvadgitā*, the *Bhāgavata* and other purānas, and the *Gitagovinda*. A rich biographical literature, giving detailed accounts of the movement centering around the activities of the Masters, soon had its growth. In the Assamese versions of the Mahābhārata, particularly by Rāma Sarasvati, a large mass of new matter has been thrust upon the original. Sarasvati's *Bhimacharita* (The Exploits of Bhima) and Sridhara Kandali's *Kānkhowa* (The ear-eater) have an independent story construction, perhaps inspired by folk form and content.

After the Assamese Brajabuli prose of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva came the rhythmic prose of Vaikunthanātha Kaviratna in his *Bhāgavata-kathā* (c. 1594-96) and *Gitākathā* (c. 1597-98) and of Gopālacharana Dvija in his *Bhaktiratnākara-kathā* (c. 1600), in which the two writers adopted the literary language of the poets. A more real prose with a dignified tone is that of the anonymous vaishnava-charitas, the vogue of which started about the

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same time as the chronicles of the Āhoms in a realistic prose of everyday use. In point of date this growth of a prose literature in the eastern most member of modern Indo-Aryan languages is very remarkable indeed.

In Assam in certain Vaishnava circles no sattra abbot could justify his appointment without writing a drama in the style of the Masters. This gave rise to a strong theatre movement, although the performance of a drama of the Masters was prized everywhere the most. Numerous songs in the style of bargita and nāmaghoshā also came to be composed sometimes merely as a work of routine by the divines. For the most part, of course, the dramas and songs of the post-Sankaradeva period do not have any outstanding merit to commend themselves. The ideals of Vaishnava poetry were so universally acknowledged that the Sākta literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, and even the political annals of the Āhoms and the Koches came to be modelled on that poetry.

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VIII

A GREAT AGE IN FINE ARTS

The Tradition of Classical Music :

The emotionalism of bhakti inspired poets all over India to lyricism and the emphasis on prayer as the chief mode of worship patronised popular music. It has been marked that the Bhakti Movement promoted the culture of the dhrupad style of singing in particular in many parts of the country. In Assam too neo-Vaishnavism brought in its train a wide culture of music. The Vaishnava music of Assam is rich and remarkable in its tone and variety.

Among the different forms of this music, introduced by Sankaradeva himself, the two tuned to classical Indian rāgas (melody-modes) are bargita, and ankiyā gitā or songs of the ankas (drama). The name of the rāga in these two types is indicated at the top of the text. In all the ankiyā gītas and only three bargitas tālas (rhythm) are also named. A bargita does not always have to keep time in its singing. When an individual bhakta pours forth his devotion in public or in the domestic temple in the measures of a bargita, his singing is not generally controlled by the time beats. At other times, especially in congregations tāla is maintained in the performance of bargitas. Like the tevaram of south India (7th-9th century) there are generally some particular tālas attached to particular rāgas so much so that people would refer to

the belowāra melody-mode as rupaka belowāra, because it is commonly timed to the rupaka tāla. On the other hand, we get instances of the application of quite a few tālas in the course of the singing of one song in one rāga. At the end of the second line of each of the songs, the syllable 'dhrum' is placed, which indicates that the first two lines constitute the dhruva or refrain, to be repeated in the singing of the succeeding verses, called pada. In the last couplet of the pada the name of the writer occurs.

Some people have, almost aimlessly, attempted to categorise this rāga music of Assam, some trying to identify it with prabandha-sangita, others with dhrupad, while still others would like to reserve it as a category by itself. As in sangita-sāstras, the prabandha-gitas, of which we scarcely get a specimen to-day, consist of several parts like udgrāhā, dhruva, melāpaka, antarā and ābhoga. In some sattras the ālāpa or anibaddha part of rāga songs in called ugār, which some seek to indentify with udgrāha. The character 'dhrum' attached to the burthen is, again, supposed to hark back to the dhruva part of prabandha. But all this leaves much ground for consideration. On the other hand, the early history of the dhrupad school refers to the reign of Mānsimha Tomar, a contemporary of Ākbar. The technique of this type, moreover, does not apply to the rāga music of Assam. In what relation this music stands to the Hindustāni or Karnātaka styles is yet to be seen. Apparently, there are names of rāgas common to all these schools, or common to at least two of them. A bargita in dhanasri may look like bhimpalāsi of Northern India and ābheri of the South. The Assamese kalyāna may

correspond to suddh kalyān of the North. But all these await the investigation of the expert for the final analysis.

In the full-scale execution of a bargita or ankiya gita there are the usual two parts of rāga ālāpa or anibaddha part and the gita or nibaddha part. In the ālāpa, popularly known as rāga diyā (the giving of the rāga, that is, its basic form) or rāga tanā (the extension of the rāga), words like Rāma, Hari, Govinda, and not the solfa syllables, are used. It is generally divided into four parts, which do not have any particular names except the third, known as tolani (the raising of the voice to a higher pitch). These four parts may perhaps be compared to the four parts of a classical ālāpa, corresponding to asthāyi, antarā, sanchāri and ābhoga. The singing of the text then follows, and this is timed to a tāla. A tāla has two parts, mul bājanā or gā-mān (the main part) and ghāt (sharp extension of the main pattern of the tāla). The gā-mān is played on the khol or mridanga and cymbals as the text of the song is sung. When the singer is in rest at intervals, the drummers play the intricate patterns of ghāts.

From quite early time in the history of Indian music attempts were made to visualise the melody-modes in the form of persons. This tendency to deification of rāgas took definite shape in the 16th century, and were particularly popularised by the rāgamālā paintings of Northern India. In Assam we have such visualisation of rāgas in the form of rāga malitā (small poems giving the mythological origin of a rāga).

Indian musicians and theorists have ascribed different melodies severally to the eight watches (prahara) of the day. Opinion, however, is at variance in regard to the assignment of rāgas to the different praharas. The sattra

musicians have also made such assignments in their own way Purvi or Puravi, for example, which is very generally known as an evening melody, is placed by these musicians in the early dawn.

No scientific treatise on the music of Assam has so far been available. A fragmentary manuscript, *Vādya-pradipa*, dealing with tālas, has been discovered, and edited by the present writer.

The Tradition of Classical Dancing

Sankaradeva, who refers to his father Kusumavara as a gandharva incarnate, has also left a rich legacy of a style of classical Indian dancing. This school has some features in common with the Manipuri style, recognised as one of the four all-India classical schools, and one could surmise the impact of the sattra school on the Manipuri rather than the reverse, as the former is the style to have evolved and established itself earlier, for the Manipuris had their Vaishnavism, with which their classical dancing is associated, only in the 18th century. It is not known what elements contributed to the evolution of the sattra style. The dances, in spite of all the neglect with which it is received by the moderns, still possess a number of hastas (hand gestures), intricate and developed choreographic patterns, distinctive costumes and a variety of masks. The music mostly depends upon the khol or mridanga, various forms of cymbals, supporting rāga and other songs. No woman dancer or actress is allowed in this school, there being no order of nuns in the sattras. Even in the village performances the women rôles are played by boys.

The sattra dances mainly centre around the anka dramas

of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva. In their performances these as well as other Vaishnava dramas are nothing but dance and music. The master of the show, that is, the sutradhāra-sutradhāri, the hero, that is, Krishna or Rāma, and the women rôles, that is. the Vrindāvana gopis, provide the class types of the dance peformance, while other notable dance features are the war dances and the dances accompanying the preliminary music called dhemāli (perhaps a clever translation of the Sanskrit term pūrvaraṅga).

The Assam School of Painting

One of the many froms in which the Vaishnava Renaissance of India manifested itself is the art of painting. Painters were employed in the work of illuminating Vaishnava and other texts like Tulsidās's *Rāmacharitamānas*, Jayadeva's *Gita-govinda*, the old Gujarati *Vasanta-vilāsa*, etc. Painters turned prolific with such subjects as the amours of Krishna and Rādhā. The *Bhāgavata-purāna*, whether in the original Sanskrit, or in annotated or translated form, came in for illumination in different regions of India. A profusely illustrated copy of the purāna, furnished with the Bhāvārtha-dipikā, was prepared in 1705 Sambat/1648 A.D. at Udaipurnagar; this is preserved in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Poona, which possesses another finely illustrated manuscript in Persian, dated 1909 Sambat, giving a prose summary of the purāna. The most absorbing part of the whole purāna, the tenth skandha, found special favour with the artists. A Gujarati verse-rendering by Bhālana with 17th century miniatures, and another copy of this skandha with notes in Old Gujarati

(1611 A.D.) with 200 miniatures have been noticed (*N.I.A.*,1,4).

In Assam also Vaishnavism brought in the practice of illuminating the holy books with small illustrative paintings. Sankaradeva is also believed to have been a painter. On one occasion he is said have painted on tulāpāt or ginned cotton paper scenes of 'seven Vaikunthas'. On another he painted with vermilion and yellow arsenic the picture of an elephant, and pasted it on a wooden bookcase to be presented to his royal patron, Naranārāyana. He also had scenes of Krishna's life in Vrindāvana woven into a sheet of cloth 180 feet long with a caption for each miniature. The illustrations in a copy of Sankaradeva's rendering of the first half of the tenth skandha of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* found in the Bāli-sattra of the Bardowa group, have been reproduced in print in a recent publication, *Chitra-bhāgavata*. The original copy bore the date 1461-Saka/1539 A.D., which seems to be too early; the work may suitably date from the late 17th century. The technique and finish of the work exhibit strong all-India affiliations, although here and there local conventions are naturally to be expected. There is some amount of convention and stylisation, which, of couse, counts for a limitation on the art. The figures are mostly in profile. Physiology is not much heeded to, and physiognomy scarcely shines bright. There is rhythm in the charming scenes of musical and dancing performances, which also exhibit some hastas or mudrās. Movement of groups is dynamically depicted. Landscape or any other background in perspective is scarcely or never attempted. Successive scenes are flatly brought on the same plane in arched or zigzag panels. Representations

of pouring rain water, rivers and lakes are of a conventional type. Mountains look like cross-sections of them as in geological diagrams. The conventions of angularity in figure drawing, fish-shaped eyes, arched eye-brows, pointed nose and sloping forehead, as Dr. Moti Chandra points out, speak of an ancient tradition, and "the lyrical draughtsmanship, simple composition, dramatic narration and splendid colours give the *Bhāgavata* illustrations a charm which distinguished them from similar *Bhāgavata* paintings from Udaipur and elsewhere."

It is evident that these paintings were done in some sattra, most probably in the Bāli-sattra, where the original manuscript was preserved. There is a copy of the original purāna with Sridhara's commentary, which has illustrated margins, in the Karchung-sattra in Nowgong; a copy of *Shri-bhāgavata-matsya-charita* by Nityānanda Kāyastha of Nāyāmarā-sattra (1644-50), of which the wooden covers and some extra folios are furnished with paintings of several of the ten incarnations of Vishnu and other figures, was found in the Dinjay-sattra; a copy of Ramānanda Kāyastha's *Kumara-harana* is preserved in the Bāregharsattra. It is thus seen that Assam Vaishnavism developed a school of painting of its own; and this art was later patronised by the Āhom monarchs and Koch chiefs of the 17th and 18th centuries.

In some sattras were to be seen mural paintings and wood-carvings of some beauty and with folk-art elements in them. The Barpetā-sattra kirtanagriha, which has now been demolished, was decorated with many finely engraved and painted wooden panels, depicting scenes from religious texts. Barpetā also saw the growth of the art of ivory carving. Painting also were provided on wooden

posts and post-plates, book-rests, raised trays used for the purpose of making offerings (sarāi), and pleasure-boats.

The Vaishnava Renaissance thus reached out to all fields of cultured and developed life in Assam, enriched them, and brought about altogether a unifying and glorifying vitality to this part of the great Bhāratavarsha.

IX

CONCLUSION

TO CONCLUDE in my own words: 'Sankaradeva's benign influence has been felt for the last few centuries in all fields of the cultural life of the Assamese people. Thousands of devotees still visualize to themselves everyday the physical beauty of the Master in its resplendent and almost transcendent glory, as has been painted by his dearest follower, Mādhavadeva:

> 'Handsome to look at, his whole physique is white and resplendent like the sun. His sight, pleasing to people in assemblies, can destory sins. He is handsome without the aid of any ornaments, grave and majestic, and wise. His lotus-like eyes are large and extremely charming; and his complexion is like the light of the moon. His gait looks like the lovely pace of an elephant. His voice is deep like thunder.

'This picture, somewhat conventional, must not, however, be very far from the real. The biographers also speak consistently of Sankaradeva's pleasant beauty. He always revelled in excellent health and physical strength, and lived up to the unusual age of nearly 120 years. In his childhood he swam across the Brahmaputra and back. In his youth Sankardeva took by the horns and pushed aside a semi-wild bull. With books in his hands, he threw off two Kachāri soldiers and ran away before a closely

chasing band of such men. He seems to have commanded a stately height. Such was his radiating personality that the youthful Mādhavadeva, who was determind not to humble himself before the saint, felt overpowered at the very sight of him and most readily prostrated before him At first inimically disposed towards him, Naranārāyana took very kindly to Sankardeva from the very first meeting.

'Equal to Sankaradeva's physical strength and beauty was his intellectual stamina and excellence. A versatile genius, he combined in himself many wonderful qualities. He was an administrator (as a Siromani Bhūyan and, later, as a gomastā under Koch régime) and social reformer, poet and dramatist, painter, musician and actor in dance-dramas. Wide and deep was his reading, and firm and persistent his intellectual grasp. In religious disputations he pushed his antagonist with sincere and persuasive arguments to the defeated corner. He often worked up the citations put forward by the opponents to his own advantage and made them move of themselves to his conclusions. His organizing capacity manifested itself in the way he placed the doctrines of his faith on a firm soil in the teeth of the bitterest opposition. Although he was "a menace to the heretics", as Mādhavadeva has described him, his was a charming personality which attracted and pleased those who were near him. A householder, he resigned himself and his all to God, and remained detached from the pleasures and pains of the world. His weal and his woe depended on that of his followers. The culture of bhakti among his disciples in the proper manner was his delight. Always busy with the writing of books and the holding of discourses on religion and philosophy,

he was not devoid of humour, which often broke forth in course of his narratives, dramatic works and in common talk.

'Sankaradeva brought the message of the religion of 'Love' home to the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism, and indicated to the individual that his voice could be heard by God if only it rose from a pure and sincere heart. His religious activities formed the basis for the growth of a culture and a literature, both rich and varied. The common man in the backwoods of the valley or on the hills could now embrace a simplified and democratized Hinduism without his having to be looked down upon by the "high" castes. The new faith had to struggle against tantrism in its varied and sometimes horrid forms, and it gained sufficient ground within the very life-time of Sankaradeva.

'The great Sankaradeva movement thus brought about a new and comprehensive outlook on life and a distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour. It accelerated the pace of a renascence of literature and fine arts like music and painting. The dignity of the individual endeavour of man as a distinct religious being and not as "the thrall of theological despotism" was declared. Assam discovered herself as an integral part of the holy land of Bhārata-varsha, and gloried in that discovery. The holy books in Sanskrit, the *litterae humaniores* of India, could no longer be sealed to the common man's view by a rigid oligarchy. The use of the local language in expositions of theology and philosophy was in itself a challenge to the erstwhile guardians of secret doctrines who understood the significance of the challenge and "protested very much". The new humanism eyed askance at the numerous blood

sacrifices, including the immolation of man, and the nice sacerdotalism that was the order af the day in Hindu society. The use of Assamese, an Indo-Aryan tongue, which formed but an island in a Tibeto-Burman ocean, as the medium for the propagation of the neo-Vaishnava faith led to its emergence as the language of all the people. The ancient kingdom of Kāmarupa was now undergoing a huge change, and it was having almost a regeneration, political and social, which timed well with the cultural resurgence initiated by Sankaradeva; and the first possibilities of a unified and modern Assam was now in evidence.' [1]

[1] *Sankaradeva and His Times*, Gauhati University, 1964, pp. 121-22, 378.

nārāyana, kāhe bhakati karu terā[1]

राग धनश्री ॥

नारायण, काहे भकति करुं तेरा ।
मेरि पामर मन माधव घने घन
घातुक पाप नाछोडा ॥ ध्रु ॥

यत जीव जंगम कीट पतंगम
अग जग नग तेरि काया ।
सवकहु मारि पूरत ओहि उदर
नाहि करत भूत-दाया ॥
ईश-स्वरूपे हरि सव घटे बैठह
जैसन गगन वियापि ।
निंदावाद पैशून्य हिंसा हरि
तेरि करहु हामु पापी ॥
काकु शंकर कर करहु करुणा नाथ
जोनो छारहु राम-वाणी ।
सव अपराधक वाधक तुवा नाम
ताहे शरण लेहु जानि ॥

Oh Nārāyaṇa, how can I offer devotion to thee !
Oh Mādhava, my vile mind doth turn murderous again and again
and doth not forsake its wickedness.

[1]This is a bargita.

All jīvas that move about, all insects,
all immovable plants and mountains, and
the world as a whole are thy body.
but I devour all creatures and stuff my belly
and do no compassion to them.

As Īśvara dost thou reside in every pot
as thou dost in universal shape.[1]
Oh Hari, a sinner I do bhaspheme and malign thee.

This doth Śaṅkara entreat thee :
O Lord of Compassion,
may not I forsake
the hallowed name of Rāma,
and it is for this that
I take refuge in thee.[2]

pāwe pari hari, karuho kātari[3]

राग केदार ॥

पावे परि हरि करुहो कातरि प्राण राखबि मोर ।
विषय-विषधर-विषे जरजर, जीवन नारहे थोर ॥ध्रु॥
अथिर धन जन जीवन यौवन
अथिर एहु संसार ।

[1] Ātman or Supreme Self is compared to universal space (mahākāśa), and the Jiva or individual self to the same enclosed in a jar (ghaṭākāśa).

[2] This bargita lyric is said to have been composed by the saint on report that a son—his first—has been born.

[3] This is a bargita.

पुत्र परिवार सवहि असार
करबो काहेरि सार ॥
कमल-दल-जल चित्त चञ्चल
थिर नोहे तिल एक ।
नाहि भय भव भोगे हरि हरि
परमपद परतेक ॥
कहतु शङ्कर ए दुख-सागर
पार करा हृषीकेश
तुंहु गति मति देहु श्री-पति
तत्त्व-पन्थ उपदेश ॥

O my Lord, prostrate at thy feet, I lay myself down and
with a contrite heart beseech thee to save my soul.

My soul is on the point of perishing through the poison
of the venomous serpent of worldly things.
On this earth all is transitory and uncertain; wealth,
kinsmen, life, youth, and even the world itself,
Children, family, all are uncertain. On what shall I
place reliance ?
Like a drop of water on the lotus leaf,
the mind is unsteady.
There is no firmness in it.
There is nothing uncertain in thy grace and no cause
for fear
under the shadow of thy feet.
I, Śaṅkara, pray to thee, O Hṛiṣhikeṣha, the dweller in
my heart,
To pilot me across this world of trouble.

Turn my heart to thee and lead me to thyself,
O Lord of all blessing and all grace.
Vouchsafe unto me the truth, the right path,
and thy kindly guidance.
Thou art my mind, thou art my destiny,
thou art my spiritual guide.
Sayeth Śaṅkara, guide me across the vale of sorrows.

soi soi thākura moi[1]

राग गौरी ॥

सोई सोई ठाकुर मोइ जो हरि परकाशा ।
नाम धरत रूप स्मरत ताकेरि हामु दासा ॥ ध्रु ॥

पण्डिते पढे शास्त्र मात्र सार भकते लिये ।
अन्तरजल फुटय कमल मधु मधुकरे पिये ॥
जाहे भकति ताहे मुकुति भकते ए तत्त्व जाना ।
जैसे वणिक चिन्तामणिक जानिया गुण बखाना ॥
कृष्ण-किङ्कर शङ्कर कह भज गोविन्दक पाय ।
सोहि पण्डित सोहि मण्डित जो हरि-गुण गाय ॥

He, he alone is my master,
who speaketh of Hari.
I am the servant of one
who singeth the Lord's name
and meditateth on the Lord's form.

---

[1]This is a bargita.

The paṇḍita readeth the śāstras,
but the bhakta realiseth its essence,
just as water floateth the lotus,
but the black-bee sucketh its honey.

Where there is bhakti, there is salvation :
the bhakta alone knoweth this truth,
as it is only the jeweller who
knoweth the philosopher's stone and speaketh of its properties.

Śaṇkara, the servant of Kṛishṇa, sayeth this :
do thou offer thy love at the feet of Govinda,
for he alone is a paṇḍita, he alone is esteemed,
who singeth the glory of Hari.

ojā̄ soja̅ pantha naheri [1]

राग धनश्री ॥

ओजा, सोजा पन्थ नाहेरि ।
कोटि करम काइ हरिको नाहि पाइ
परल भव बेरि बेरि ॥ ध्रु ॥

तप जप तीरथ करसि गया काशी वासि वयस गँवाइ ।
जानि योग युगुति मति मोहित विन भकति गति नाइ ॥
राम-नाम मह निखिल पुण्य रह ओहि निगम-तत्त्व वाणी ।
कलिको परम धरम हरि-नामा पढ़ि पुनु मरम नजानि ॥

[1]This is a bargita.

कृष्ण-किङ्कर कह क्षणिक देहा रह नर तनु पुनुहु नपाइ ।
करम-गरब सव दूर करि हरि-चरण चिन्त चित्त लाइ ॥

O scholar, why dost not thou
perceive the straight Path !
A crore of rituals have been performed,
Hari hath not been attained to,
and thou hast time and again been falling
upon the cycle of rebirth !

Thou hast muttered spells, undergone austerities
and visited holy places too,
and hast spent thy years in Gayā and Kāśī.
Yoga and Logic have been mastered by thee,
yet clouded is thy mind,
for without devotion there can be no salvation.
All piety resideth in the name of Rāma :
this is the essential message of all Holy Books.

Hari-nāma is the supreme religion of the Kali Age :
thou hast read of this,
yet hast thou not grasped its meaning.
This servant of Kṛishṇa sayeth :
the body tarrieth but a moment,
human life then cannot be had once again,
setting aside the vanity about rituals
do thou apply all thy faculties
to meditate on the feet of Hari.

herahu māi, chalali vipine madhāi[1]

राग धनश्री ॥

हेरहु माइ चललि विपिने मधाइ ।
वेणु विषाण निसाने आवत
हरषे हरषे धेनु धाइ ॥ ध्रु ॥

ओहि जग-मोदन कन्धे दधि-ओदन
गो-धन आगु बुलाइ ।
वङ्किम नयन सरोरुह हासि
हेरइते भुवन भुलाइ ॥
मदन-दमन-रूप पेखि पुनु पुनु
मूरुछि परय सुरनारी ।
सोहि जगजीव-वियोग अव सहबि
कैसन चित्त हमारि ॥
हरि-विरहानल-आकुल गोपिनी
दरशन दिवसे नपाइ ।
हरि-गुण कहि रहि प्रेमे झुरय नीर
शङ्कर एहु रस गाइ ॥

Look here O mother, there proceedeth Mādhava
to the forest ;
he cometh with the sound of flute and horn,
and in great mirth do the cows pace along.

Here the giver of bliss to the world
taketh a load of curd and rice on his shoulders
and driveth the cows ahead of him.

[1]This is a bargita.

At the sight of his lotus-like eyes and side-long smiles
the whole world is enchanted
Seeing time and again his form that beateth Madana
in beauty the women of the town fall into a swoon.
How can our hearts now tolerate
separation from the one that is the life of the
world ?

The gopīs, missing Kṛiṣhṇa for the whole day long,
were stricken with the agony of separation from
Hari ;
they busy themselves with praises of Hari,
tears ever rolling down from their eyes.
Śaṅkara recounts them in such a frame of mind.

kaha re uddhava, kaha prāner bāndhava he[1]

राग तुर वसन्त ॥

कह रे उद्धव कह प्राणेर बान्धव हे प्राण-कृष्ण कबे आवे ।
पुछये गोपी प्रेम-आकुल-भावे नाहि चेतन गावे ॥ ध्रु ॥

बाछुरि-ध्वनि सुनि गोवत्स पेखि ।
लागे आगि गावे उद्धव सखि ॥

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[1]In this song as well as in other songs the names Mādhava, Hari, etc., are applied indiscriminately to mean Kṛiṣhna.

The cowherdesses of Vraja, who were extremely enamoured of Kṛiṣhna but were pained to have been deserted by him almost unceremoniously, meet his messenger, Uddhava, coming to them all the way from Mathurā to Vraja.

कालिन्दी देखि सखि फुटय बुक ।
एथाये खेलाइछिल मे चान्दमुख ॥
हरिल नयन-सुख ॥

विरिन्दावन वैरी हामार भेलि ।
पेखिते नाविछुरो गोपाल-केलि ॥
ध्वज वज्र यव अङ्कुश चाइ ।
तथाये कान्दो हामु लोटाया काय ॥
गुण-गोविन्द गाइ ॥

कृष्ण-सूर्य बिने व्रज आन्धार ।
नेदेखों ए दुख-अवधि-पार ॥
आर कि पेखबो गोपाल-प्राण ।
कृष्ण-किङ्कर शङ्कर भाण ॥
हरिको हृदये जान ॥

Tell O Uddhava, tell us, O friend of our souls,
when wouldeth Kṛishṇa, our life-breath, return.
Thus questioned the gopīs, all tormented with love,
and with no senses on their bodies.

At the sound of flutes and at the sight of cows
O Uddhava, O friend, a fire is kindled on our limbs.
At the sight of Kālindī, O friend,
there is rupture in our hearts,
for it is here on her banks
that one with a face like the moon played ;
that bliss of our eyes in stolen away.

Vṛindāvana hath turned our enemy,
for with it ever before our eyes
we never can forget Gopāla's pranks.
Here we see the marks made by the flag, vajra,
barley-corn and lotus,[1]
and we fall down and roll on them and cry,
singing the glory of Govinda.

Vraja is covered with darkness without Krishna, its sun,
and we see no shore to this sea of our anguish.
Oh, shall we ever set our eyes on Gopāla, our soul ?

Śaṅkara, the servant of Kṛiṣhṇa, sayeth this much :
know you now Hari in your hearts.

namo namo mādhava, vidhira vidhidātā[2]

नमो नमो माधव विधिर विधि-दाता ।
तुमि जगतर गति मति पिता माता ।।
तुमि परमात्मा जगतर ईश एक ।
एको वस्तु नाहिके तोमात बितिरेक ।।

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[1]It is believed that there were the five auspicious marks o dhvaja (flag), vajra (Indra's weapon, thunderbolt), yava (barley corn), padma (lotus) and aṅkuśa (elephent goad), imprinted o Kṛiṣhna's palm of the foot

[2]This is the god Siva's prayer to Kṛiṣhna and is taken from th poem, 'Hara-mohana' (The enchantment of Siva) in the *Kirtāna-ghosha*

तुमि कार्य कारण समस्ते चराचर ।
सुवर्ण कुण्डले येन नाहिके अन्तर ॥
तुमि पशु पक्षी सुरासुर तरु तृण ।
अज्ञानत मूढ जने देखे भिनाभिन ॥
तोमारेसे मायाये मोहित सर्वक्षणे ।
तुमि आत्मा तोमाक नजाने एको जने ॥
समस्ते भूतर तुमि आछा हृदयत ।
तत्त्व नपाइ तोमाक विचारे वाहिरत ॥
तुमिसे केवले सत्य मिछा सवे आन ।
जानि ज्ञानीगणे करे हृदयत ध्यान ॥
नवाञ्छोहो सुख भोग नमागो मुकुति ।
तोमार चरणे माञ्र थाकोक भकति ॥
मुखे लौक नाम मोर करों तव कथा ।
हृदयत पाद-पद्म थाकोक सर्वथा ॥
सज्जनर सङ्ग नुगुचोक सर्वक्षणे ।
एतेक प्रसाद मागों तोमार चरणे ॥

I bow, I bow to Thee, O the giver of Law to the
Law-maker ;
Thou art the motion and motive, and parent to the
world.
Thou art the Supreme Soul, the sole Īśvara of the world ;
there is nothing real beyond thee.
Thou art the cause and the effect
of everything mobile and immobile
just as there is no difference between gold
and the gold ear-ring

Thou art animals and birds, gods and demons,
trees and grass;
it is due to nescience that the bewildered seeth
multiple phenomena.
Being ever infatuated with thine illusion
the fool doth not know thee who art his soul;
thou resideth in the heart of all creatures :
not knowing this truth, he seeketh thee outside.
Thou alone art the real, everything else is false ;
knowing this the wise men meditate on thee in their
hearts.
I seek no spell of happiness,
and salvation is not my need ;
let me have only devotion at thy feet,
may my lips utter your name, my ears hear thy glory ;
may the lotus of thy feet be ever in my heart :
may not the company of the holy ones be meaningless
for me ;
this is the favour I seek at thy feet.

kaita pāibo prāna-gopāla āmi[1]

घोषा ।। कैत पाइबो प्राण-गोपाल आमि ।
हराइल अरुणलोचन स्वामी ।।

[1]This is a kirtana from the 'Rāsa-kriḍā' Section in *Kirtana-ghosha*. The cowherdesses of Vraja, who flocked round Kṛishna in the Vṛindāvana one full-moon night in the hope of his love, were of a sudden left by him in that forest to bewail the haughty way in which they treated Kṛishna's affection.

पद ॥ उच्च वृक्ष देखि सोधे सादरि ।
शुनियो अश्वत्थ वट पाकडि ॥
याहान्ते देखिला नन्द-कुमार ।
नेन्त चुरि करि चित्त आमार ॥
हे कुरुवक अशोक चम्पा ।
कहियो कथा करा अनुकम्पा ॥
मानिनीर दर्प करिया चूर ।
नजानो कृष्ण यान्त कत दूर ॥
अबा तुलसी समिधान दिया ।
तुमि गोविन्दर चरण-प्रिया ॥
याहान्ते देखिला नन्द-कुमार ।
प्राणतो अधिक प्रिय आमार ।
हे जाइ यूथि सखी मालती ।
कृष्ण-परशे कि लभिला गति ॥
समस्ते गोपीर जीवन-धन ।
देखिला याहान्ते नन्द-नन्दन ॥
हे आम जामु बेल बकुल ।
नाहि उपकारी तोमार तुल ॥
कृष्णर विरहे देखो आन्धार ।
कवा कैक गैल प्राण आमार ॥
किनो तप अबा करिला भूमि ।
कृष्णर चरण परशे तुमि ॥
मिलि आछे आति आनन्द भाव
देखो रोमाञ्चित तोमार गाव ॥
पूर्वतो वराहे आछा आलिङ्गि ।
तुमि सर्व काले कृष्णर सङ्गो ॥

देखिछा कृष्णक जानो निश्चय ।
कहियो आमात हुयो सदय ॥
मृग-पत्नी सखी देखिला हरि ।
तोमार नेत्रर आनन्द करि ॥
यान्त प्रिया समे गति-विलासे ।
हेर कुन्द-गन्ध-कुङ्कुम वासे ॥
कतो गोपी बोले शुनियो वाणी ।
लताते कृष्णर पुछो कहानी ॥
कृष्णर नखर परश पाइ ।
देखा पुलकित समस्त काय ॥
बोले वाला सवे उन्मत्तभावे ।
कृष्णक वनत विचारि चावे ॥
कृष्ण-गुण गान्ते प्रेम उपजे ।
कृष्णते मन समुदाय मजे ॥
समस्ते विह्वल हुया गोपिनो ।
करे कृष्ण-लीला कतो आपुनि ॥
कृष्णर किङ्करे शङ्करे भणे ।
बोला हरि हरि समस्त जने ॥

'Where shall we meet Gopāla, our very soul !
We have all lost our lord with eyes like the
tender sun !!

Seeing tall trees they do endearingly ask :
'Hear, O aśvattha, O vaṭa, O parkaṭi,
have you seen the son of Nanda going along ?
for he hath run away having stolen our hearts.

'O kuruvaka, O aśoka, O champā,
would you do some kindness by telling us a word ?
We know not how far hath Kṛishṇa travelled,
having humbled the vain women
offended with him ?

'O tulasī, wouldst thou give us a reply,
for thou art the beloved of Govinda's feet :
hast thou seen the son of Nanda going along,
the one that is more beloved even than our own life ?

O jāti, O yuthi, O mālatī, our friends,
what bliss have you got at the touch of Kṛishṇa !
have you seen the son of Nanda going along,
the one that is the treasure of all the gopīs' life ?

'O āmra, O jambu, O bilva, O bakula,
there are none so benevolent comparable to you.
We see all darkness at separation from Kṛishṇa ;
tell us where hath that our life-breath gone ?

O earth, what such penance hast thou done
that at the touch of Kṛishṇa's feet
a great joy hath been caused in thee,
and we see such horripilation on thy body ?
Verily even in ancient days Varāha hath embraced thee ;
thou art ever Kṛishṇa's mate,
we know thou hast seen Kṛishṇa ;
oh, tell us the truth in kindness to us.

O doe, our friend, thou must have seen Hari
going along with a mistress in great sportive mood,

and giving joy to thine eyes,
for see there is still a trail of perfume
left by kundas and kumkuma.'

Some gopis said : 'Oh, hear a word :
let us enquire of the creepers about Kṛishṇa's
movements
for look what horripilation there is on their bodies
at the touch of Kṛishṇa's finger-nails.

They all together uttered such very nice words
and ransacked the forest in search of Kṛishṇa,
they sang the songs of Kṛishṇa.
and there was such a madness of love in them
that their minds were entirely engaged with him.
Delirious all the gopīs
began to enact the divine acts of Kṛishṇa.

This doth Śaṅkara, the servant of Kṛishṇa say :
do all men say, 'Hari, Hari.'

hari, hariyo klesha, he hrishikesha[1]

घोषा ॥ हरि हरियो क्लेश हे
हृषीकेश करुणा-सागर ।
माया-महोदधि माझे मजिलोहो
माधव मोक उद्धर ॥

[1]This is a kirtana from the 'Veda-stuti' (The Vedas' hymn to Nārāyana) section of the *Kirtana-ghoshā*.

पद ।। बुद्धि अहङ्कारे आवरिले अति
महामूढ़ भैलो स्वामी ।
तोमार अखण्ड आनन्द-रूपक
किमते जानिबो आमि ।।

दीन-दयाशील दियो उपदेश
तोमार चरणे धरो ।
श्रवण-कीर्तन स्मरण-भक्तिक
सदाये यिमते करो ।।

मिछा तर्कवादे भैल अन्धकार
ताते भ्रमो मन्दमति ।
तयु ज्ञान-पन्थ सुजिया नपाओ
करा हरि मोर गति ।।

तयु गुण-नाम मुखे नछाडोक
कृपा करा चक्रपाणि ।
माधव वामन गोविन्द बोलन्ते
मुकुत हैबो कैसानि ।।

तुमि सत्य ब्रह्म तोमात प्रकाशे
जगत इटो असन्त ।
जगततो सदा तुमिओ प्रकाशा
अन्तर्यामो भगवन्त ।।

एतेकेसे ज्ञानीगणे अवशेष
जगतके बोले हरि ।
आवे जगजीव तोमार चरणे
भजो हृदयत धरि ।।

यत तप आछे समस्ते करोक
परोके पर्वते उठि ।
समस्ते तोर्थत स्नानिया फुरोक
वेदक पढोक तुष्टि ॥

यत यज्ञ आछे समस्ते यजोक
करोक योग अभ्यास ।
हरिर कीर्तन नकरि तथापि
नेरय मृत्युर त्रास ॥

नाहि देहेन्द्रिय समस्ते कर्तार
शक्तिक धरा एकले ।
तुमिसि सर्वज्ञ तुमि सर्वकर्ता
तोमाक सेवे सकले ॥

येन चक्रवर्ती राजाक योगावे
सामराजे कर-भार ।
ब्रह्मा आदि करि देवर ईश्वर
तयु पावे नमस्कार ॥

तोमारेसे माया कर्मे वन्दी हुया
संसारे उपजो मरो ।
दुःख-सागरत त्राण करा हरि
तोमार चरणे धरो ॥

तुमि अन्तर्यामी समस्त लोकर
तुमि महेश्वर देव ।
तुमिसि सर्वज्ञ नृसिंह तोमाक
मने करो आमि सेव ॥

संसार-चक्कर करवते चिरे
नेरे महामोह भय ।
तोमार चरणे पशिलो शरणे
रक्षा करा कृपामय ॥

तुमि महागुरु तोमार चरणे
मन यदि लवे वास ।
तोमार कृपाये सवे सिद्धि हैब
नलागे योग-अभ्यास ॥

तुमि आत्मा हेन जानिया तोमाक
चित्ते भजे यिटो जन ।
तुच्छ पुत्र-दारा विषय भोगत
नाहि तार प्रयोजन ॥

तोमार नामक मुखे फुरो गाइ
हिये तयु रूप धरि ।
शुने माने ध्वनि पलाय पातक
डाकि बोला हरि हरि ॥

O Hari, O Hṛiṣhikesha, the lord of my senses,
O sea of compassion, we are immersed in the
ocean of illusion,
O Mādhava, do thou lift us up.

Buddhi and ahamkāra have overpowered us ;
O master, we are completely stupefied ;
how can we know thy entire and blissful form !

O one compassionate to the poor, render us such
admonition
that we may firmly stick to thy feet,
that we may practise bhakti unceasingly
through śravana, kirtana and smaraṇa

Absurd reasoning hath created a gloom,
and with an infatuated mind we do wander in it ;
we find not the path of the supreme knowledge of thee
show thou us our Way.

O Chakrapāṇi, do thou us this kindness
that our tongue may not forsake thy glory and
thy name
Oh, when may we gain salvation
through uttering Mādhava, Vāmana, Govinda !

Thou art the real Brahman,
and in thee is manifest this unreal world,
O Lord, O inner controller,
thou too dost manifest thyself in the world.

That is why the wise calleth the residue world Hari,
O the world's soul,
we do offer love now at thy feet,
firmly held in our hearts

Mayeth one make all penances,
mayeth one jump headlong from the hill,
mayeth one take bath in all holy waters,
mayeth one read the Vedas to heart's content,
mayeth one make all sacrifices that there be,

mayeth one practise yoga ;
even then can one not get rid of the horrors of
Death without reciting Hari's name.

Not possessing a body or limbs,
thou possessest alone all the powers of all doers ;
thou art all-knowing, thou art all-doing,
all others do simply serve thee.

Just as all people pay their tributes to the overlord,
so also do all gods with Brahmā at their head
make obeisance at the feet of thee, the lord of them all.

Being fettered with the doings of thy power of illusion
we are born and we die in a cycle of rebirths ;
O Hari, we do beseech at thy feet,
do thou save us from this sea of sorrows.

Thou art the inner controller of all men;
thou art Lord Supreme God ;
thou art omniscient ;
thee, O Nrisimha, do we salute from within our hearts.

The saw of the wheel of cycle of rebirth rendeth us into
pieces;
delusions and fears never leave us free ;
We take refuge at thy feet,
O all-compassionate, do thou save us.

Thou art the supreme guru,
if somehow our minds can settle on thy feet,
through thy grace everything will be achieved,
and there will be no need of practice of jnāna.

One who adoreth thee within one's heart,
knowing thee to be one's very soul,
hath no need of such trifles as sons, wives and
enjoyment of the senses

With thy image in my heart,
may I sing thy name and roam about ;
and may all evils fly at the sound of those words.

Call aloud 'Hari, Hari.'

uddhavaka sambudhi mātanta krishne pache[1]

उद्धवक सम्बुधि मातन्त कृष्णे पाछे ।
कर्मबन्ध एराइबे प्रबन्ध यार आछे ॥
वैष्णवर सङ्ग सिटो लैबे प्रथमत ।
मोहोर चरित्र शुनिबेक भकतत ॥
मोर नाम-कीर्तन करिबे सर्वक्षणे ।
हृदयत मोर रूप चिन्तिबे यतने ॥
मोर यश गाया यिटो करे गीत नृत्य ।
नाहि तार चिन्ता सिटो भैल कृतकृत्य ॥
शुनियो उद्धव तुमि रहस्य भकति ।
करिबा अभ्यास तुमि थिर करि मति ॥
समस्ते भूतते व्यापि आछो मइ हरि ।
सवाको मानिबा तुमि विष्णु-बुद्धि करि ॥

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[1]This is a kirtana from the 'Shrikṛishnar vaikuntha-prayāna' (Kṛishna's passing away) section of the *Kirtana-ghoshā* and represents Kṛishna's last words to his devotee, Uddhava.

ब्राह्मणर चाण्डालर निविचारि कुल ।
दातात चोरत येन दृष्टि एकतुल ।।
नीचत साधुत यार भैल एकज्ञान ।
ताहाकेसे पण्डित बुलिय सर्वजान ।।
विशेषते मनुष्यगणत यिटो नरे ।
विष्णु-बुद्धि सर्वदाय मोके मान्य करे ।।
ईरषा असूया अहङ्कार तिरस्कार ।
सवे नष्ट होवे तेवे तावक्षणे तार ।।
देखि सखिगणे जोनो हासे सवे बेढ़ि ।
मइ साधु इटो चोर हेन लज्जा एरि ।।
कुकुर चण्डाल गर्दभरो आत्मा राम ।
जानिया सवाको परि करिवा प्रणाम ।।
समस्त भूतत विष्णु-बुद्धि नोहे यावे ।
काय वाक्य मने अभ्यासिबा एहिभावे ।।
विष्णुमय देखे यिटो समस्ते जगते ।
जीवन्ते मुकुत होवे अचिरकालते ।।
सकल प्राणीक देखिबेक आत्म-सम ।
उपाय मध्यत इटो अति मुख्यतम ।।
मोर इटो धर्मर अल्परो नाहि हानि ।
यिहतु सम्यके मइ कैलो तत्त्व-वाणी ।
दाम्भिक शठत नकहिबा इटो तत्त्व ।
सदा उपदेश दिबा वैष्णवजनत ।।
स्त्री-शूद्रो करे यदि आमात भकति ।
ताहात कहिबा इटो ज्ञान महामति ।।
आक भक्ति करि पढ़े यिटो ज्ञानी लोके ।
महा शुद्ध हुया ज्ञान-दीपे देखे मोके ।।

जानिला उद्धव आवे दिलो उपदेश ।
तोमार कि शोक मोह गुचिल निःशेष ॥
ब्रह्मा हर हलायुध लक्ष्मी प्रिय जाया ।
परम सुन्दर मोर देखा इटो काया ॥
सवातो अधिक तुमि मोर प्रियतम ।
नाहि आन बान्धव उद्धव तुमि सम ॥
भकतेसे मोर हृदि जानिबा निश्चय ।
भकतजनर जाना आमिसि हृदय ॥
मइ विना भकते निचिन्ते किछु आन ।
भकतत परे मइ नेदेखोहो आन ॥

And then Kṛishṇa accosted Uddhava and said :
He who hath efforts to get release from the bondage
of karma,
shall seek the company of Vaishṇavas at the beginning
and listen to the recital of my exploits from the bhakta.
He shall extol my name every hour
and meditate on my form with care.
One that performeth music and dances
with the singing of my glory
hath nothing to worry, but shall verily attain his goal.
O Uddhava, hear then what the mystic doctrine of Love is
and practise it with an unperturbed mind :
I, Hari, live broadcast in all creatures,
take them all as Viṣhṇu and respect them too.
He alone is learned and knoweth everything
who hath no discrimination

between a brāhmaṇ and a chaṇḍāla.
who possesseth the same regard for the benevolent
and the thief,
who hath the same understanding for the vile
and good.
The man, who rateth all persons as Viṣhṇu
and doth always respect them as such,
hath all his jealousy, envy, hatred and egotism
destroyed in a trice.
Forsaking the bashful fear lest friends come, surround
and laugh at thee,
forsaking the conceit : 'I am honest, here is a thief.'
knowing the dog, jackal and donkey possess the
same blissful soul,
prostrate thyself to all of them.
Until thou seest the image of Viṣhṇu in all creatures,
profess the idea with the application of thy body,
mind and speech.
One who seeth Viṣhṇu pervading the whole universe
is released even before death in no time.
To rate all creatures as one's own self
is the supreme among all ways.
Even the least of this dharma can never go in vain,
for I do thus directly speak to thee the whole truth.

Do thou not reveal this message to the proud and
the cheat.
but always offer admonition to the Vaiṣhṇava.
If women and śūdras make love to me,
impart to them, O high minded, this knowledge.

The wise who studieth it in a spirit of love,

getteth purified in soul, and seeth me in the light
of supreme knowledge.
Thou hast listened to what I have admonished ;
have thy grief and thy delusions forsaken thee ?
Brahmā, Hara, Halāyudha and my dear wife Lakshmi
are this my beautiful body as thou seest ;
by far the most beloved of mine art thou ;
there is no friend, O Uddhava, like thee,
know thou for good that the bhakta is my soul
and know that I am his soul ;
the bhakta never is concerned with anyone other
than me and I too am concerned with none but him.

krishna-sūrya bhailanta udita[1]

घोषा ॥ कृष्ण-सूर्य भैलन्त उदित ॥
नाम-धर्म करिला विदित ॥
पद ॥ सत्य युगे प्रथमत ब्रह्मा आदि देव यत
हरि-नाम करिला गुपुत ।
किनो दायामय हरि नामक वेकत करि
कलि-पाप कराइला लुपुत ॥
यिटो महा म्लेछ जाति सिओ शुद्ध होवे आति
मुखे मात्र हरि-नाम लय ।

[1]This is one of the three kirtanas of the 'Bhāgavatar tātparya' (The quintessence of the Bhāgavata-purāna) section of the *Kirtana-ghoshā* and is a pithy exposition of the tenets of Śaṅkaradeva's eakaśa-rana nāmadharma creed.

कलिर भयत गैया नामत शरण लैया
रहिल समस्त धर्मचय ॥
इटो कलि काल घोर पापर नाहिके ओर
आत हित चिन्तिला प्रजार ।
जगतरे पाप हरे स्मरणे निस्तार करे
हेन नाम करिला प्रचार ॥
दोषर सागर कलि आत हरि-नाम लैलि
धर्म अर्थ पावे मोक्ष काम ।
समस्तके दायातरे आवे देव दामोदरे
विदित करिला हरि-नाम ॥
मन्त्र तन्त्र यज्ञ यत तप तीर्थ कोटि शत
हरि-नाम अधिक सवाते ।
किनो भाग्य किनो भाग्य हेन हरि-नाम लाग
पाइले लोक मुकुत साक्षाते ॥
यिटो नाम नेरे मुखे पाइले मोक्ष महासुखे
जाना कृष्ण तुष्ट भैल तार ।
गुरु भैला जगतरे करिलेक सिटो नरे
कोटि कोटि पुरुष उद्धार ॥
पातक शुखान वन हरि-नाम हुताशन
क्षेणेकते दहि करे छन्न ।
हेन नाम प्रचारिला पातकीक निस्तारिला
परम कृपालु नारायण ॥
देवरो ईश्वर हरि तान्त महा यत्न करि
लैयो एक-शरण साक्षात ।
यार इच्छा मोक्ष पाइबे नलागे दूरक याइबे
आछा हरि सवार हियात ॥

कृष्णर किङ्करे कहे हरि-नामे पाप दहे
राम-नाम सवातो अधिक ॥
यिटो जने नाम स्मरे सकल पातके तरे
अनायासे पावे मुकुतिक ॥
जगत निस्तार हेतु करिला गरुड़-केतु
इवार विदित हरि-नाम ।
आयु याय आले-जाले केतिक्षणे धरे काले
निरन्तरे बोला राम राम ॥

Kṛishṇa hath risen as the sun,
and hath revealed nāma-dharma to all.

In the Satya Age the gods with Brahmā at their head
concealed Hari-nāma.
Oh, how gracious is Hari that he hath restored it,
and hath suppressed the sins of the Kali Age.
The impurest of all castes becometh the purest
with but the utterance of Hari-nāma.
All virtues on earth for fear of Kali
have taken refuge in nāma.
There is no end to vices in this grim Kali Age ;
Kṛishṇa hath come to think of the good
of the people and hath propagated nāma,
which killeth all vices of the world
and the mere remembrance of which giveth salvation.
The Kali Age is a veritable sea of evils,
one attaineth the four ends of dharma,
artha, kāma and mokṣha[1]

[1]Dharma (piety), artha (money, wealth), kāma (desires of the body), and mokṣha (final release from life) are considered as the four main efforts (puruṣārtha) of human life.

if only one taketh to Hari-nāma in this Age.
God Dāmodara out of grace for all
hath now revealed Hari-nāma.
Hari-nāma excelleth a hundred crores of
mantras, tantras, sacrifices, penances and
pilgrimages.
What a fortune, Oh, what a fortune is it that
people have gained such Hari-nāma
and get liberated forthwith.
He whose tongue never forsaketh nāma
attaineth salvation in great ease ;
know that Kṛishṇa is pleased with him ;
he becometh a guru to the whole world,
and that person resurrecteth
crores and crores of generations of his.
Evils are as a dry forest,
and Hari-nāma is a conflagration
that burneth down that forest in a trice ;
the supremely compassionate Nārāyaṇa
hath revealed such nāma and hath reclaimed all
sinners.

Hari is the Lord of all gods ;
may he who hath a thirst for salvation
make great efforts to take sole refuge in him ;
and for that none need travel far,
for Hari resideth in the hearts of all men.

This Kṛishṇa's servant sayeth :
Hari-nāma burneth all evils,
Rāma-nāma is the crown of all things ;
he who meditateth on nāma
getteth rid of all sins

and secureth salvation in ease.
He whose banner showeth Garuḍa
hath this time revealed Hari-nāma to the world.
Lo ! life passeth in vain
and it is not known when Time seizeth thee ;
do thou, therefore, call-out, 'Rāma, O Rāma'.

vaiśampayan vadati suniyo janmejaya[1]

वैशम्पायन वदति शुनियो जन्मेजय ।
एहिमते यान्त येवे दैवकी-तनय ॥
नारीगणे शुनिलेक कृष्ण आसिबार ।
उरुक-मुरुक करि पिन्धे अलङ्कार ॥
आसा आइ बाइ सवे पदुलिक जाओं ।
माधव गोसाँइ आसे नेत्र भरि चाओं ॥
कृष्णक देखिबे लागि विह्वल-स्वभावे ।
लवरा-लवरि करि गृहर बजावे ।
पिन्धिल अञ्जन मात्र एक नयनत ॥
केहोजनी एक पावे दिलेक आलक्त ॥
एतेकते कृष्ण आसिबार वार्ता पाइ ।
सेहिमते उठि लवरन्ते कतो जाय ॥

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[1]This from the *Rukmiṇī haraṇa-kāvya* gives an account of the flutter among the city women of Bhiṣmaka's capital, Kuṇḍina, when Kṛishna enters it.

विपरीत करि कतो पिन्धे अलङ्कार ।
मार्गत आँरय कतो सातसरी हार ॥
भरित मुकुट आँरे नूपुरक माथे ॥
कृष्णक चाहिबे लागि चले आथे-वेथे ॥
केहोजनो ओभताइ पिन्धिल कापर ।
आञ्चलक तल करि खुम्पन्हि उपर ॥
एतेकते शुनिलेक आसि पाइला हरि ।
दिलेक लवर खुञ्चनिक हाते धरि ॥
पिन्धिवाक लागि वस्त्र लैला भाल चाइ ।
गावर कापर पेलाइ थवे सोलकाइ ॥
एतेकते शुने हरि आसे राजबाटे ।
विमोहित हुया कतो जाय उलङ्गटे ॥
कतोजनो सुखे गैया आछिल घुमटि ।
दिलेक लवर चकमक करि उठि ॥
हलफल करे स्तन केश आउल-जाउल ।
कैरा हरि बुलि सवे चले येन बाउल ॥
केहोजनो देखावे आङ्गुलि उपदेशि ।
एहेन्तेसे कृष्ण गोसाँइ जान्त रथे बसि ॥
देखियोक रूप केन नयनर सुख ।
सुकुमार तनु हासों हासों करे मुख ॥
भालेतो मुहिल गोकुलर गोपोगण ।
इहाङ्क देखिया कोने तापरिबे मन ॥
तेनय देखिलो येन शुनि आछों काणे ।
एहि बुलि जर्जरित भैल कामवाणे ॥
काहारो लागिल आति माधवत ध्यान ।
वाहुवे आलिङ्गि येन करे नेत्रे पान ॥

एकदृष्टि करि केहोजनी चाइ थाके ।
चक्षु बलाइ कृष्णे जोनो चाहिबे आमाके ॥
अतिशय भोल हुया कतोजनो उठि ।
टान-छले कृष्णक देखावे काष-पिठि ॥
स्तनक देखावे हास्य करि मुख ढाकि ।
वस्त्र काति करि टेर चक्षु चाहि थाकि ॥
विमोहित हुया कतो माधवक देखि ।
चित्रर पुतलि येन नभासय आखि ॥
मदने पीड़िला आति सहिते नपारे ।
विमोहित हुया आलगते चुमा पारे ॥
एहिमते विमोहित भैल यत नारी ।
एकभिति नचाइ रङ्गे चलन्त मुरारि ॥

Quoth Vaiśampāyana ; Hear, O Janamejaya ;
as in this way went along the son of Daivaki.
the ladies had the news of Kṛishṇa's coming.
and they were all haste to put on various ornaments ;
'Come, O mother ; come, O sister, let us all stand
by the gate;
let us see the coming Lord Mādhava to the fulness
of our eyes.'
Agitated at heart with the desire to see Kṛishṇa.
they made great hurry to pour out of their houses.

Some of them had put collyrium only on one eye.
some had coloured only one foot with alakta,
when they heard of Kṛishṇa's coming
and they ran out in such a state.

Some of them put on ornaments very improperly indeed,
some putting on the seven-stringed necklace
below the waist,
the diadem on the leg and the anklet on the head,
and came out with great eagerness to eye on Kṛishṇa.
Some ladies wore their clothes in all disorder :
with the upper end hanging and lower end high up,
when they learnt Kṛishṇa had arrived
and began running with the end to be stuck
but in their grip.
Some had selected the best dress for change
and put off the clothes already on their body ;
meanwhile they heard Kṛishṇa was going
along the street,
and they in their confusion moved out all naked.
Some ladies were sleeping in great comfort ;
they got up from sleep hurriedly and began running,
their breasts dangling, their hair all dishevelled ;
they cried, "Where is Hari ?" and ran like mad ones.
Some ladies pointed with their fingers, saying :
'Look, there goeth Lord Kṛishṇa seated in that chariot.
His form is the very bliss of all eyes,
Beautifully young is his body, his face beaming
with smiles.
Who can resist the mind's temptation at his sight ?
Just as we have heard of his beauty,
so we see him now.'
With these words they got sore afflicted with amours.
Some ladies' hearts were absolutely engaged with
Mādhava,
as if they were embracing him in their arms
and drinking him in with their eyes.

Some women looked on at Kṛishṇa with a steadfast gaze
wishing if only Kṛishṇa would widen his eyes and
look at them alone.
Extremely infatuated some of them stood up
exhibiting their torso in that act,
smiling and covering the face, they exhibited
the breasts,
pulling the cloth aside and looking with
sidelong glance.
Some were so much stupefied at the sight of Mādhava
that they did not wink their eyes as if they were
each a figure in a painting.
Others were struck with a lust
that they could not bear,
and, losing all senses, imprinted kisses on the air.
Thus all women were in great flurry ;
but Murāri cast not his eyes on sides
and proceeded forward in glee.

pari punu bhāta chapaya kaha vāni[1]

परि पुनु भाट चपय कह वाणी ।
कृष्णक आगु रूप बखानि ।।
जय यदुनन्दन देवकु देव ।
तोहारि चरणे करहु बहु सेव ।।

[1]This is from the drama, *Rukminī-harna*. A wandering ministrel (bhāṭa) travels from Bhiṣmaka's capital, Kuṇḍina, to Dvārakā, meets Kṛishṇa and gives him an account of the wonderful beauty of Rukmini, Bhiṣmaka's daughter.

तोहि महिमा कहतु नाहि अन्त ।
पूरल परमा कीरिति दिगन्त ॥
तुहु सम पुरुष कतिहु नाहि पाइ ।
सुन अब वचनेक बोलोहो गोसाँइ ॥
हामाकु कुण्डिल नगरी अनुपाम ।
आछे कन्या एक रुक्मिणी नाम ॥
भीष्मक-राज-नन्दनी वरबाला ।
बाढय नव जोनि चन्द्रक काला ॥
कि कहब रमणीक रूप परचुर ।
वयनक पेखि चान्द भेलि दूर ॥
नयनक पेखि पाइ वर लाज ।
कयल झाम्प कमल जल माज ॥
बन्दुलि अधिक अधर करु कान्ति ।
ओतिम मोतिम दशनक पान्ति ।
सुवलित भुज-युग रतन मोलान ।
उरु करिकर कटि डमरुक ठान ॥
नव-पल्लव-रुचि पद-युग सोहे ।
पेखिते सुर-नर-मुनि-मन मोहे ॥
वाणी अमिया-रस गुणे नोहे हीन ।
राजकुमारीक वयस नवीन ।
कतनु यतने विधि कयो निरमाण ।
से कन्या हवे प्रभु तोहारि समान ॥
कहलु स्वरूप अब वचन विचारि ।
होवय गृहिणी जब रुकमिणी नारी ॥
तव गृहवास साफल होवे नाथ ।
कहल भाट उपर करि हात ॥

कृष्णर किङ्कर ओहि शङ्कर बोल ।
करु अव नर सव हरि हरि रोल ॥

The wandering minstrel prostrated himself and spoke
his words in musical measures,
picturing Rukmiṇī's grace and excellence to Kṛishṇa :

O scion of the Yadus, O god of gods,
I tender many salutations at thy feet.
None can speak out thy glory,
for thy supreme fame toucheth the very horizon,
there existeth no man like thee anywhere.
Hear a word of mine, O Lord !
Ours is the non-pareil city of Kuṇḍila ;
and there liveth a damsel named Rukmiṇī.
That excellent lady is the daughter of King Bhīṣmaka :
she is growing into womanhood
even more beautifully than the digits of the moon.
How can I describe her overflowing beauty ?
Even the moon fled away at the sight of her face
and the lotus too dived deep into water being ashamed
at the sight of her superior eyes.
Her lips shine better than bandhujiva flowers.
The two lines of her teeth are but the finest pearls.
Her two finely shaped arms are verily like stalks of
lotus in gold.
Her thighs are trunks of elephants
and her waist shaped like a ḍamaru.
The two feet's beauty is that of fresh-blossomed
leaves of trees.
At her sight the minds of men and gods are enchanted.

GANDHI SMARAKA GRANTHALAYA
BANGALORE-1.

Her words are the very flow of divine nectar,
and her excellences are of no mean degree.
The princess is tender of age.
What labours the Creator God had put in in shaping her !
That damsel standeth comparison only with thee.
I tell thee God's own truth in these very much
considered words.
If that lady Rukmiṇī becometh thy consort,
O my master, your domestic life would be
more than fulfilled.
Quoth this the bard with his hands raised up.
This Śaṅkara the servant of Kṛishṇa, sayeth,
and O men, make now the sound, 'Hari, Hari'.

hari, hari, kinā bheli rājākumāri[1]

राग गौरी रूपक ताल ॥

हरि हरि किना भेलि राजकुमारी ।
कमल-नयन पूरि वारि भुरावत
घन घन फोकारे मुरारि ॥ ध्रु ॥

करत कतनु तेरि नारी निकारु
मोहे विरह दहे आगि ।

[1]This is a song from the drama, *Rukminī-haraṇa*. It gives expression to Kṛishṇa's great concern on account of Rukmini, who writes him a letter telling him of her determination to marry him and of, at the same time, the difficulty that has been created by an intrigue which would make her marry Śiśupāla, the notorious king of Chedi.

GANDHI SMARAKA GRANTHALAYA
BANGALORE-1.

तुहु जव जीवन बाला छोड़ह
हउँ तब तुवा वध-भागी ॥
तेरा दरशन कैसन होइ
सुमरिते तनु मन तावे ।
मिलल अधिकहु हरिको आकुल
कृष्ण-किङ्कर रस गावे ॥

O God, my God, what hath happened to the princess !
His lotus-like eyes filled with tears
Murāri sighed and sighed again.

What torment hath been wrought on thee, O woman,
by the contact of the fire of separation from me !
O damsel, if thou givest up thy life,
I shall be responsible for thy death.
How can I have a look at thee !
Even thy remembrance
flares up my body and soul.

Hari's infatuation thus became all the keener.
This rasa doth the servant of Kṛishṇa sing.

daivakī-udare udaya johi deva[1]

दैवकी-उदरे उदय जोहि देवा
कयलि भकतक त्राण ।

[1]This is the final mukti-maṅgala-bhaṭimā (a panegyric of Vishnu-Kṛishṇa, which wishes everybody bliss and beatitude : it is comparable to the bharata-vākya of Sanskrit dramaturgy) in the drama, *Kāli-damana* (The Quelling of the Demon, Kāliya).

अघ वक धेनुक केशी संवशंक
कंसक ध्वंसल प्राण ॥
विरिन्दा-विपिन-विहार-विशारद
शारद चन्द्र-समान ।
सोहि जगत-गुरु तेरि सतते करु
मुकुति-मङ्गल विधान ॥

जोहि गोप-वधू विविध विधर्षल
परिरम्भल भुज मेलि ।
जोहि यमुना-जल यामिनी कामिनी
मिलि कय रङ्ग केलि ॥
दुष्ट अरिष्टक मुष्टिक मोड़ल
शङ्खचूड़ लेल प्राण ।
सोहि जगत-गुरु तेरि सतते करु
मुकुति-मङ्गल विधान ॥

जोहि भूविकहु भार उतारल
निज जन पूरिये काम ।
पापी पापक मूल उपाड़े
उचरि जाकेरि नाम ॥
जाहे नाम सुनि नीच श्वपच मुनि
दोहो होवे एकु समान ।
सोहि जगत गुरु तेरि सतते करु
मुकुति मङ्गल विधान ॥

सोहि वैकुन्ठक कृष्णक नाटक
उत्पाटक-दुख-मूल ।

पुण्यक सञ्चन कलि-मल-ध्वञ्चन
नाहि नाहि ओहि तुल ॥
सुन सभासद देखु विचारि
भेलह लोक एकाकार ।
धरमक करमक आशा दूर कर
हरि विने गति नाहि आन ॥
श्रीरामराइ हरि विने नाइ
जाहेरि हृदय-धियान ।
भकतिक शकति जाहेरि मिलल
परम ईश्वर गियान ॥
पाषण्ड-दण्डन मण्डन भकतक
हरि-रस-रसिक सुजान ।
कालि-दमन करावत नाटक
कृष्ण-किङ्कर ओहि भाण ॥

सुन सव लोइ वचनक मोइ
सव तेजि भज हरि-पाव ।
ओहि भव-दुर्गम-सागर-तरणे
कृष्ण-पाद-पल्लव-नाव ॥
देवक उपरि राजा माधव
धरमक उपरि नाम ।
कोटि कलपक पातक-नाशक
डाकि बोलहु राम राम ॥

May that guru of the world,
the god who rose like the sun from the womb of Daivaki, the saviour of the faithful,
and the one who killed the asuras, Agha, Vaka, Dhenuka and Kaṁsa with his whole family,
and became equal in beauty to the autumnal moon and an expert in sports in the Vrindā forest,
ever give you blissful beatitude.

May that guru of the world,
who seduced the wives of gopas in many ways,
and embraced them in extended arms,
who in the nights played gleefully with the women in Yamunā waters,
and quelled the wicked Arishta and Muṣhṭika,
and took the life of Śaṇkhachūḍa,
ever give you blissful beatitude.

May that guru of the world,
who lifted the weight of sins of the earth,
fulfilling the wishes of his chosen people,
by the pronouncement of whose nāma
the sinners can uproot all sins,
at the hearing of whose name
the dog-eating scavenger and the holy ascetic are raised to the same level,
ever give you blissful beautitude.

This drama of Kṛishṇa of Vaikuṇṭha
uprooteth all sufferance,
bestoweth piety and destroyeth the evil of
the Kali age ;
it hath no pareil.
Hear O men in the assembly, give you your thought
and see how all people wallow in sin.
Give up all hope in a religion of rituals,
for there is no other Way than Hari.

Shri-Rāmarāya,
who hath no other innermost thought than of Hari,
who hath attained to a knowledge of Īśvara
by dint of bhakti,
who is a queller of heretics and adorer of bhaktas,
who is a past master of the rasa of Hari-bhakti,
hath this *Kāli-damana-nāṭaka* made,
and this servant of Kṛishṇa hath composed it.

Hear, O all men, a word of mine,
forget everything else to serve at Hari's feet.
The tender leaf-like feet of Kṛishṇa
are a boat to ferry you across
the difficult sea of being.
Mādhava is the sovereign over all gods,
and nāma is supreme over all creeds
and can destroy the sins of a crore of cycles.
Oh, sing aloud ; 'Rāma, Rāma'.

hari he, bujhalo tuhu vara nidaya[1]

राग सुहाइ यतिमान ॥

हरि हे बुझलो तुहु वर निदया
निकरुण-वाणी-वाणे मरम हानि
दारल हामाकेरि हृदया ॥ ध्रु ॥

पति सुत सव अब छोड़ि परल नाथ
तुवा पद-पङ्कज-आग ।
भकत-कृपाल गोपाल तेरि कैसे
टुटल नव अनुराग ॥

तुहु विने माधव देहा नाहि राखब
विरहिणी छोड़व प्राण ।
नकरहु नैराशा तुहु जतगवासा
कृष्ण-किङ्करे एहु भाण ॥

O Hari, we do now realise, thou art supremely cruel.
Thou hast shot the arrows of iron words
and hurt our hearts
and rent them asunder.

We have fallen at thy feet, O master,
having forsaken our husbands and children,

---

[1]This is a song of the Vraja gopis, who run to the Vrindāvana forest on the Yamunā one full-moon evening only to hear unpalatable homilies about domestic morality from Kṛishna. It is taken from the play, *Keli-gopāla* (The Love Sports of Kṛishna).

Famed as compassionate to the bhaktas,
O Gopāla, how hast thou renounced thy new love ?
Without thee, O Mādhava, we shall never retain our bodies;
stung with separation we shall give up life.
Do thou not disappoint them, O thou container of the world.
This doth the servant of Kṛishṇa pray.

māi, māi harika bichuri kata rahabi[1]

राग अहिर एकतालि ॥

माइ, माइ, हरिक विछुरि कत रहबि ।
जाहे नेहारि सुर-रमणी भूरुछि परे
ताहे विरह कत सहबि ॥ ध्रु ॥
वाम वाहुत वाम कपोल मिलाय केलि
कदम्बक मूले वेणु वाय ।
सुनि वेणु धेनु धरत तृण दशनु
रहि नीर नयन झुराइ ॥
सुनिया मोहन धुनि तम्भित तरङ्गिणी
पुलक कमल-कुल दोले ।
हरिणो हरावत चेतन ए तनु
विछुरि रहत रस-भोले ॥

[1]This is another song from the *Keli-gopāla*, representing the Vraja gopis' very much painful sentiments when they have to stay behind doors during day-time after they have given their nights to rāsa dances with Kṛishṇa.

नील तनु पीत पट पेखि गगन घन
बोलि सूरुज करि मान
छाया-छत्र धरत करत मधुर धुनि
कृष्ण-किङ्करे रस भाण ॥

Mother, O Mother, how long canst thou forget Kṛishṇa,
and stay quiet ?
How long canst thou stand separation from him,
at whose sight even heavenly damsels fall into
a swoon ?
He placeth his left cheek on the left shoulder
and playeth the flute under the cheering kadamba tree ;
and hearing its music the cows hold the grass
between the teeth and stand still,
tears rolling down from their eyes.
Hearing that enchanting music,
the river standeth still,
and a host of lotuses danceth in horripilation,
the doe is benumbed,
and she forgetteth everything in the madness
of her joy.
The clouds of the sky sight the yellow silken robe
on his blue limbs,
mistake it for the sun, and make obeisance,
holding an umbrella of shadow,
and making a sweet rumbling sound.
This is the rasa that Kṛishṇa's servant doth sing.

anya devi deva nakaribā seva[1]

अन्य देवी देव नकरिवा सेव
नखाइबा प्रसाद तार ।
मूर्तिको नचाइबा गृहो नपशिबा
भक्ति हैब व्यभिचार ॥
एके कृष्ण देव करियोक सेव
धरियो ताहान नाम ।
कृष्ण-दास हुया प्रसाद भुञ्जिया
हस्ते करा तान काम ॥

Bow not thy head to other gods and goddesses,
neither do thou partake of the offerings
made unto them.
Cast not a look at idols,
neither enter their shrines ;
or thy devotion will be vitiated.
Make devotion unto Kṛishṇa alone
and recite his name.
Be a servant unto Kṛishṇa
and partake of the offerings made unto him,
and with thy hands also perform his work.

[1]This is one of the upadeshas (admonition) attached to different sections of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Book II.

yāra yena mati kare vedaka vyākhyāna[1]

यार येन मति करे वेदक व्याख्यान ।
निज अर्थ भकतिक तेजि बुजै आन ॥
केहो बोलै वेदे कवै यज्ञ व्रत दाने ।
केहो बोलै क्षुद्र देव पूजा तीर्थ स्नाने ॥
केहो बोलै वेदे कवै ज्ञानतेसे गति ।
गुणर इच्छाये बुजै यार येन मति ॥
तप जप परम सन्न्यास महादाने ।
नपावे आमाक सांख्य योग तत्त्वज्ञाने ॥
केवल भकति मात्र मोक करै वश्य ।
कहिलो उद्धव इटो तोमात रहस्य ॥

People interpret the Vedas according to their own whims. They find sanction for everything except bhakti.

Some make it out that the Vedas inculcate ceremonials, sacrifices, gifts and homas ; others, that the Vedas prescribe the worship of smaller gods, pilgrimages and bathing in sacred waters ; others again that the supreme bliss comes through knowledge.

Their interpretations are coloured by the dominant attributes of their minds.

But, know this, O my friend, I am not accessible through knowledge, neither through penance, nor through renunciation, nor through gifts. I am not accessible to yoga nor to knowledge ; I am tied down by bhakti alone.

---

[1]This is a part of Kṛishna's advice to Uddhava (*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Book XI). It would be found complementary here to the poem, 'Uddhavaka sambudhi mātanta kṛishne pāche.'

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